



IN THE OPEN



WILLIAM O. STODDARD

Ralph.

From his father.

Madison, New Jersey.

Mar. 7th 1908.

William O. Borden



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IN THE OPEN

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STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

BY

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

AUTHOR OF

“TALKING LEAVES” “TWO ARROWS”

“THE RED MUSTANG” ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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CONTENTS

I

MUFFLED

Ambushed by Indians

II

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

How Put Saved the Sugar

III

THE BIG FISH

A First Lesson in Flyfishing

IV

A WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

The Bear Who Stole the Pails

V

CAMPING OUT

Partridges and Fish

VI

BEN'S BLAZE

A Tale of a Prairie Fire

VII

A LONG SWIM;

Or, The Drifting Boat

CONTENTS

VIII

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

A Queer Search for Sap

IX

A RIPPER

And How It Steered Itself

X

THROUGH A BARN

How a New Station was Made

XI

THE UNLUCKY SETTLERS

An Adventure with "Ungrateful Insects"

XII

SETTING THE BROOK AT WORK

What a Water-wheel Did

XIII

FOREIGN PARTS

And the Adventures of a Mule

XIV

UP THE CREEK

The Fishing Trip of the "Ark"

XV

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

The Exploits of a Pony

ILLUSTRATIONS

IN THE OPEN	<i>Frontispiece</i>
GOOD SPORT	<i>Facing p.</i> 40
THE FIRST DAY IN CAMP	" 66
"I CAN'T CLIMB IN!"	" 90
EVERY FIRE HAD A GREAT IRON KETTLE ON IT	" 96
COURT HOFFMAN GRASPED HIS WHEEL-TILLER WITH ALL THE STRENGTH HE HAD	" 110
IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL CAST, IF THE BOYS HAD BUT KNOWN IT	" 164
"ALL HE NEEDS IS SOME OF MY EVERLASTIN' LINIMENT"	" 186

IN THE OPEN

IN THE OPEN

I

MUFFLED

Ambushed by Indians

UBE, me boy, what's the name of this?" exclaimed Pat Linihan, as the last wagon of the mining outfit was hauled into position, and the grizzled veteran he spoke to was dragging the harness from his favorite span of mules.

"The name of it? Do you mean this hollow we've pulled up in?"

"Dade an' I do, thin. Ye've put a name of some kind to ivery rock an' bush we've seen the day."

"Well, then, mebbe it's the Chico Valley. It's a place I'll be glad to git out of with all the hair on my head."

IN THE OPEN

“It’s a swate spot, for all that. Is it near here thim Wallopy redskins lives that makes it a bad boordin'-house for white min?”

“Yes, this is just the place. But there isn’t many of ’em, and we didn’t send ’em word we was comin’. Mebbe we’ll find our way through the pass before they scent us. They’re venomous, they are. Worst kind.”

The two mules had been standing as if they were listening to him, but now, as old Rube cast them loose, the off mule suddenly threw up his heels and set out at a sharp trot into the grass, while his mate stretched his long neck forward in a sonorous bray.

“That ’ll do, Gov’nor,” remarked Rube. “We all know you kin do it. You and the Senator had better jest feed yer level best while yer chance is good. Mebbe you’ll be an Indian’s mule yet, before you die.”

“Saints preserve thim, thin. It’s foine mules they are,” said Pat, very soberly. “Misther Adams, was ye hearin’ the charakther he gave the place we’re in?”

“Is there any danger, Rube?—any real danger?”

“Not if we can find our way through the pass, Charlie. It’s more like the neck of a bottle

MUFFLED

than anything else. Hope they haven't corked it up with rocks for us."

A tall, slightly built boy was Charlie Adams, and his bright blue eyes were wide open, with a look in which there was more fun and love of adventure than fear of anything — even of Hualapais * Indians.

He had been staring around the broad, level valley while the miners were going into camp, and it did seem as if he had never looked upon anything more beautiful. The grass was so luxuriant and green; the scattered groves had been set down exactly in the right places; the mountains arose so grandly on every side; surely there could not have been imagined a prettier picture in a more wonderful frame. He said so to Rube Sarrow, but all the reply he got from the grim old wagon-master was:

"Ye-es, and the redskins mean to keep it. Thar's been more than one outfit wiped out a-tryin' to squeeze through the Union Pass."

The wagons of the train were drawn up in two rows, about fifty yards apart, the light "ambulance," from which Rube had unhitched the Governor and the Senator, was pulled across

* Pronounced Walapi. A tribe formerly troublesome in northern Arizona.

IN THE OPEN

one of the open spaces at the end, and a brisk fire had been started at the other. The ground so inclosed contained room enough to "corral" all the mules and horses of the train in case of an attack, and the members of that exploring party were likely to be able to defend such a fort against any ordinary band of red men.

Not a sign of the presence of Indians in the neighborhood had yet been discovered, and before the middle of the afternoon the scouts sent out came in with a couple of fat deer.

"That looks well," growled old Rube. "The valley hasn't been hunted out lately. Mebbe we'll git through all right."

The animals were watched pretty carefully, nevertheless, and they all had a good long rest and time to feed.

"They'd betther make the best of it," said Pat Linihan to Charlie Adams. "It's a long pull and a hard one they've got before thim. Wud thim redskins take the skelp of a mule, do ye s'pose?"

"They'd give more for yours, Pat. They'd risk almost anything for hair as red as you have. Light their pipes, you know."

"That's more'n I kin do wid it meself. But thim ambulance mules, now. Luk at the ears

MUFFLED

of thim. Did yez iver see the loike on any human bein' before?"

The Governor and the Senator were mules of the largest and ungainliest type, and they seemed to remember enough of what Rube had said about Indians to keep them pretty close to the camp all the evening. None of the others were permitted to stray to any great distance, and about midnight they were all silently collected.

The men had taken the whole matter as quietly as had their four-footed servants, eating and sleeping as if there were no Indians in the world, or at least in the neighborhood of the Hualapais Mountains and the Union Pass.

All the men, perhaps; but Charlie Adams was not a man yet, and the young blood was tingling through his veins at the thought of actual danger and an attack from Indians. There was no need to wake him up or call him when the time came to get ready for another march. He was wide awake from head to foot, and seemed to be everywhere at once, with his repeating carbine in his hand.

It was a queer piece of work Rube and his teamsters were at for the next hour or so. They began by wrapping all the old blankets they had, and some new ones, around the circumference

IN THE OPEN

of the wagon wheels, and they greased the journals of the axles until there was no chance left for a squeak to come from them.

“They’ll travel without a sound,” said old Rube. “How’re ye gittin’ on with the critters, boys?”

That had been a job which interested Charlie Adams exceedingly. Every mule and horse was fitted with a pair of buffalo-skin or blanket moccasins, so that his feet would fall silently upon the hardest ground. Some of the men said “shoes,” some “boots,” and Pat Linihan called them “stockin’s, begorra”; but Rube said “moccasins,” and Charlie took him at his word.

Between one and two o’clock, the camp, with its fire piled up to a brighter blaze than ever, was left behind them, and the long mining train moved onward toward the dangerous pass. It was wonderful how little noise they made, and Pat Linihan remarked to old Rube:

“Sure an’ it’s the first toime I iver druv a muffled mule.”

“Muffle yer tongue,” growled old Rube. “That’s one thing I forgot.”

They made good speed, and before long Charlie Adams was aware that the narrow

MUFFLED

wagon-trail they were following had led them between great walls of rock.

“We’ll do it,” whispered old Rube to Charlie. “They’re up there on the cliffs, some of ‘em, as a matter of course; but we’re going to beat ‘em this time. They have an awful advantage over any fellows down here. All they need do is to tumble down rocks on us in some places. There’s just one bad spot to go by now,” said he, a little later, “but it’s almost daylight. I wish we were well past the neck.”

Nearer and nearer drew the walls of rock, but there were no sounds made for them to echo, until at last, as he and the Senator pulled their ambulance over an unusually rough place, and paused for breath, the Governor seized the opportunity to stretch out his ugly neck.

Oh! what a bray was that! It seemed to fill every cranny of the Union Pass, and stir up the sleeping echoes, and climb up over the crags, and old Rube instantly shouted:

“Whip up, boys! Forward, now, for your lives! That thar was jest one other thing we forgot to muffle.”

The whips cracked sharply enough now, and the Governor received at least his share in payment for his music.

IN THE OPEN

There was no more silence. In less than a minute the heights above them rang with fierce whoops and yells. The savages had been taken a little by surprise, but they were there, and they had been waiting for that train. It had nearly passed them, but they were determined to make an effort for its capture.

Whoop after whoop, and then the crash and thud of rocky masses tumbling down the chasm.

It was getting lighter every minute, and Charlie Adams strained his bright eyes up along the crags in the hope of seeing a mark for his carbine.

Suddenly the sharp reports of rifles came from the front, and old Rube exclaimed:

“Indians in the pass! That’s bad. We were almost through.”

So they were, for the ambulance Pat was driving, and that Rube and Charlie were guarding, was the very tail of the train.

“Look out, Charlie!”

“Bedad, they’ve done it! What ’ll I do now?”

A heavy boulder had come smashing down through the tilted top of the ambulance, making dire destruction of the closely packed stowage, and startling Pat half out of his wits.

“Unhitch! Save your mules!”

MUFFLED

The Governor and the Senator had something to say about that. They were worse scared than Pat himself, and they declared it, as mules will, in about half a bray apiece; but then they sprang wildly away up the pass, dragging behind them the battered ambulance, Pat and all.

“Go it, Pat! Come on, Charlie! There’s a fight ahead, but we’re beyond the neck.”

The “fight ahead” was over quickly enough, for less than half a dozen Indians had clambered swiftly down to hide behind logs and rocks, and try to check the advance of the train. It was getting light enough for them to use their rifles, but so could the miners, and that was bad for that squad of “Wallopies,” as Pat called them. Only two of them climbed up the rocks again, and all the harm they did was to wound three of the mules and send a ball through the arm of a driver. Their friends on the heights were fairly driven to cover again by the storm of rifle-bullets sent after them, and Charlie Adams’s carbine cracked as loudly as if he had been six feet high and weighed two hundred pounds.

“I wonder if I hit any of them?” he said to Rube, after they reached an open place and halted the train.

IN THE OPEN

“Dunno 'bout that. Most likely. I kinder hope we barked some on 'em. But that there was a leetle the tightest squeeze I ever hed in Union Pass. All because I didn't muffle the bray of that mule.”

II

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

How Put Saved the Sugar

F Put doesn't get here," said Polly McGregor, "the last teacupful of sugar has gone into the pies. Mother said so."

The only reply made by Pamela Sanders was: "Polly! oh, Polly, look at Jack!"

"He's a-squirrelling along the fence after the boat," shouted Polly. "He'll get it, too."

It was a small scow row-boat tied to a stake of the rail-fence a dozen rods out from the shore where they stood. The water was up over all the meadow. It had risen to the place where the boat was tied the night before. That was the shore then, but it was ever so much higher now, on the very morning of Thanksgiving Day. Beyond the flooded meadow Owl Creek was rushing and roaring and whirling down as

IN THE OPEN

if it were angry all over at not having more room. The bridge was in its way, too, and it was taking hold of that in a manner that made all the framework shiver every now and then. Pamela Sanders screamed again as Jack scrambled along the rails to a place where he had to hold his feet up to keep them out of the water, but Polly shouted at the top of her shrill voice: "Get it, Jack; Put 'll need it to cross the creek for Thanksgiving."

"Jack 'll do it, Polly," said a deep voice behind her, and there stood her father, chuckling over the pluck of his ten-year-old son. He added: "If the bridge goes down, though, that boat won't bring the team over, nor Put either. The creek's running like a mill-race."

Jack's peril of a cold bath ceased as soon as he was able to clamber down into the boat. He could pull it along by the fence better than he could row it, and Polly shouted to him all the way to the shore. His father pulled the old punt out on the grass, remarking: "There! if the water rises high enough to float it again, we can say good-bye to the bridge."

There was a vast amount of excitement among the five farm-houses along Owl Creek that morning, and the centre of it all was in Squire

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

McGregor's kitchen, around the new cook-stove. The next strongest place for it was in the dining-room, perhaps, or wherever Jack and Polly might happen to be.

Other people could leave the house to look at the creek and the bridge, but Mrs. McGregor and Aunt Betsy had a Thanksgiving dinner on their hands and a new stove to cook it with, and they could not leave their post of duty, not even when Polly rushed in to assert that Owl Creek had risen another foot, and looked as if it had some more water coming.

"Betsy," said Mrs. McGregor, for the ninth time, and more and more excitedly, "the stove's doing first-rate, but I do wish I knew about Put. Something's happened to him or he'd have been here by this time."

"There won't be sugar nor coffee—"

"Nor tea; and if the Clarkes are to stay all night we'll want those blankets. Growing colder every minute. Going to freeze hard. What can have happened to Put?"

"Oh dear me! That storm!"

That was it. Everything had gone on finely until the storm came. Squire McGregor had strong points, and hospitality was one of them. He had said he had the biggest dining-room on

IN THE OPEN

Owl Creek, and his crops that year had beaten everything, and he was going to have the whole settlement eat Thanksgiving dinner with him. They were all more or less related, and they all agreed to come and call it a family gathering.

Perhaps they would not have begun to gather so early as they did on the morning of Thanksgiving Day if they had not all been so excited about Owl Creek. As it was, Jack and Polly had company before ten o'clock, and every boy and girl that came hurried down to see what an awful place the bridge was getting to be.

"It's holding itself up till Put gets here," said Polly.

"If he isn't here pretty soon the creek 'll beat him," said Jack; but he and two other boys walked right across the bridge and back again, and one of the girls shut her eyes while they did it.

The excitement grew fast around the new stove, and it was no wonder that it got red-hot on three griddles and a corner of one door. It was a stove that was doors all around, and griddles all over, and cooking-places everywhere.

"We'll go right on with the dinner, Betsy," said Mrs. McGregor for the fifth time. "Put 'll get here; I know he will."

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

Her husband had looked in just before she said it, and he added: "He'll pull through or kill the team. Good team, too."

For some reason everybody else expressed great confidence in Put McGregor. He was a boy people expected to pull through or break something. His father looked as if *he* must have been that kind of boy. He had named his two sons after old Israel Putnam and Andrew Jackson. Polly's real first name was Martha Washington. The squire was cram-full of patriotism, and Put had heard the story of the wolf and the story of the horseback ride downstairs till it almost seemed to him as if he had killed that wolf and ridden that horse himself. Jack felt somewhat so about the battle of New Orleans. Put was exactly like General Grant in one respect, for he could drive horses when he was eight years old. Now, when he was fourteen, his father trusted him alone with a team anywhere. He would let him go to Martinsville and back with a load, just as General Grant's father used to send him to Cincinnati.

The Saturday before Thanksgiving there had been a council of dinner around the new stove. Put's mother and grandmother and Aunt Betsy and old Miss Rollins from up the creek had gone

IN THE OPEN

over everything there was to cook with, and all the people to be cooked for, and before they were half through Polly went out to the barn to find Put.

“Put,” said she, “you’ve got to go to Martinsville on Monday.”

“I’d rather go than not,” said Put.

“We’ve got so much cooking, everything’s going to be used up before Wednesday. We’ve got to have some blankets for the spare beds, and some sugar and some coffee and some tea, or there won’t be enough to go around.”

“And I’ve got to buy powder and shot enough to last me all winter,” said Put; “caps, too”; and just then he heard his mother calling him.

It was Monday morning early, just before he let the roan span take their gait toward the bridge, when Put heard the last of his directions about what he was to do in Martinsville. He had nothing in the spring-wagon with him except his feed oats and a keg of butter and two baskets of eggs and three cheeses and his gun. He had thirty-five miles to go, and he could do it in one day and come home the next. There had been no rain for two weeks, and the road was in fine order; so was the roan team, and so was Put McGregor.

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

It was grand weather for a drive to Martinsville, and Put got there early in the afternoon. All his purchases were made before tea-time, and he spent the whole evening at Deacon Langworthy's house, talking with him and his wife and the girls about the grand Thanksgiving Day there was going to be on Owl Creek. He went to bed early, but he woke up several hours earlier than he had counted on. It was not thunder that woke him, nor fire-crackers, but a tremendous rattle of rain on the roof and the roar of an out-and-out old-fashioned November storm.

"There goes the road, if it keeps up," said Put to himself.

That was what Squire McGregor was at that moment saying to his wife. And Polly punched Pamela Sanders to wake her up, and told her:

"Pam! Pam! don't you hear it rain? All the sugar 'll be spoiled.

Pamela did not exactly wake up, but she said, sleepily: "Put won't let it rain on the sugar."

That was what he himself said about it; but he was all wrong when he added so confident an opinion that the rain would be over before morning.

IN THE OPEN

It was pouring at breakfast-time, and it was a credit to Put that he could eat all the same. His mother, at home, put two sugars in his father's coffee, thinking of Put and his cargo, and Polly left the table twice to look out of the window.

"He won't start to-day," said the squire.

But Put might have done it if Deacon Langworthy had not added to all his wife said about sugar and coffee: "Your powder 'd be ruined, Put; and, besides, you'd never get there."

It rained all day, and all that Tuesday evening, and on into the night, but early on Wednesday morning there was a clear sky.

Put got out the roan team and stowed his things in the wagon before breakfast was ready.

"Better eat enough for all day," said Mrs. Langworthy, "and I'll put you up something. It 'll be 'most night before you get to Durfy's Cross-roads, and there's no telling what time you'll get home."

"The roads 'll be deep," said the deacon; but Put was eating too fast to make any answer.

"Put is just the boy to do it," said Squire McGregor to his wife and all the family at the breakfast-table on Owl Creek.

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

And Jack said to Polly: "He doesn't know a thing about the bridge."

"It's got to wait for him," said Polly, emphatically.

Put did not know what the storm had been doing until he got out of Martinsville. Then he began to find out something. He and the roan team were glad that there was nothing heavy in that wagon before they had gone three miles.

"Worst mud I ever saw," said Put. "The road's just a river of it."

One mile more and they came to the slough that crossed the road east of Carley's farm. When Put had passed it on Monday there had been dust on the bottom of that slough, but there was something else there now, and he halted his horses to look at it.

"There's no telling how deep it is," said Put, "and it's running strong, too. Now, boys, g'lang!"

The roan team went forward, and Put stood up to engineer them. Deeper, deeper, deeper, and a very long breath was drawn just before he exclaimed:

"We're stuck! Six inches more and the water 'll be in the wagon-box, and away goes the sugar."

IN THE OPEN

There was pluck in the roan team, however. They rested for a moment, and took a drink, and then they leaned into their collars with all their strength. Steadily, well together, one leg out of the mud and then another, and the wagon came along.

“The powder-canister’s safe, anyhow,” said Put, “but the water’s getting into the wagon. There! Hurrah! Good for you! G’lang! Go it, boys!”

There was no need for any whip, for the roan team understood the matter perfectly. In a minute and a half more they and the wagon were at the top of the little knoll west of the slough.

“Saved the sugar this time,” said Put.

Put had known all his life that if you made a road out of good, rich Michigan farm land a heavy rain could soak it into mush, but he had never before seen wheels go down so deep into anything.

It was hard work for the roan team, and it was two o’clock in the afternoon when they were walked into the shed at Durfy’s Cross-roads. They had a rest and a feed there, and so did Put; but there were twenty miles yet to go, and old man Durfy said: “You’ve done enough

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

for one day; but if you're fool-bent on doing some more, you'd better not waste any time here."

"I'll get home in the night sometime," said Put.

"Your hosses 'll have something to say 'bout that, my boy. It isn't any use to spoil as good a span as that is."

Put went ahead with them, nevertheless, as soon as they had finished their oats, and he pushed on until he found out what old man Durfy meant when he said: "Wait till you get into the woods on the bottom-land this side of the hills. The corduroy's all rotted out. You'll find your pulling cut out for you there. I went through it once in a rain before they put on the corduroy."

Every shattered log of that old-time road-mending made it worse for Put. The mud-holes were something to think about after he got out of them. The team had to stop and think about it, too, and Put was glad, in one of their thinking spells, that he had loaded his gun.

It was a covey of partridges, and he brought down three of them, fine, fat, heavy fellows; but when, at halting-places farther on and along the

IN THE OPEN

road as he went, he obtained three more and nearly a dozen squirrels, they neither added much to the load in the wagon nor did anything to lighten the other load which was beginning to weigh upon his spirits.

The horses were getting fagged out, and the mud was up to the wheel-hubs half the time, and every little hollow and run of water he came to seemed to have a special faculty for delaying him.

Darkness comes earlier in the woods than it does in the open country. Sunset was only another name for night, but after it came Put and the roan team toiled on wearily for another mile. It was growing colder, and there was a north wind whistling among the leafless trees and swaying the green boughs of the pines and hemlocks.

"Not another mile," said Put to himself, aloud. "This team's got to have a rest, and I've got to camp out. One place is about as good as another, and it's getting as dark as pitch."

He managed to find a pine-knot by groping among the underbrush near the road-side. As soon as that was lighted he hunted along for an open place, and drove his team out of the mud and in among the trees.

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

"The folks 'll sit up waiting for me," said he, dolefully, "and mother 'll keep supper hot till it's ever so late."

He was right about that, but he did not know how pluckily Jack insisted upon sleeping on the settee in the dining-room and keeping the fires agoing there and in the kitchen. The new stove worked vigorously all night.

Put McGregor did not do that exactly, but he had a fire. He kindled one at once that gave him light enough to unharness his horses and feed them, and then to gather a great heap of wood. Logs, branches, bark, everything that would burn and that he could move, came to that heap. It was not for one big bonfire, but Put declared of his blaze, "I won't let it go out if there's brush enough in these woods to keep it going."

He gave the roan team a good rubbing-down, and then he ate the lunch he had put up at Durfy's and all that was left of the lunch he had brought from Martinsville.

Colder and colder blew the north wind, but the horses were well blanketed and were partly sheltered by some bushes. The six new blankets in the wagon were just the thing for Put. There was a big maple-tree a little north of the

IN THE OPEN

fire. He spread hemlock branches at the foot of that tree till the bed they made was as soft and springy as a hair mattress. A sack of feed oats made a good pillow, all the blankets were spread for service, and it was a pretty good bed except for having so large a bedroom.

Put had never before slept in the open air, and it was a great sensation. There was no danger of Indians, bears, panthers, or other wild beasts, nor of any thief creeping in to steal the sugar and powder, but he put buckshot into both barrels of his gun and leaned it against the tree, within reach, before he lay down.

He listened to the rising wind and watched the fire-light playing among the trees, and precisely when he shut his eyes he did not know. How long he had been asleep before something awakened him he could not guess. He had had a long nap, for the fire was burning low, and he arose to put on more logs and branches. Then he went over and took a look at the roan team. They had eaten their oats, and he took off their nose-bags. They were all right, and he went back toward the maple-tree. It was just then that something startled him.

Right beyond the tree and out in the darkness he saw something shine and move. It

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

made a shiver go all over him, and he stepped forward and picked up his gun. "No man's eyes are as wide apart as that," thought Put. "It may be a panther. Here goes." Up came the gun, and the midnight woods rang with the double report as two grists of buckshot went hurtling out into the darkness. The frightened roan team snorted and reared, and Put heard a great crash among the bushes, as if something had fallen heavily. "Hope it isn't a man," he said; but he reloaded his gun, lighted the best pine-knot he could find, and marched boldly out to investigate.

There was something there waiting for him as he cautiously peered around with his torch held high. "What! a buck? What horns! Why, there hasn't been a deer killed in these woods for five years!"

No; but deer will wander, and storms drive them; and they have a silly curiosity about fire sometimes, so that men hunt them with torches; and that buck had stared too long at Put McGregor's blaze. Put had never before killed a deer, but he knew what to do next; and then he felt as if all the sleep had gone out of him. He lay down and tried to invent a way for getting the buck into the wagon. He thought

IN THE OPEN

and thought and thought, and he had almost done it when his eyes closed. When he again opened them only a few brands were left of the fire and light was coming in among the trees. He sprang up from among his blankets, exclaiming: "Now for home! That buck—I know how to get him in."

He fed his horses after he had looked at his game. "Frozen almost solid," he said of the mud in the road. "I can drive home easy enough."

A broiled partridge and a drink of water made a hunter's breakfast for him, and then he cut two stout saplings and trimmed them. When the horses were harnessed and the wagon driven to where the buck lay, the back-board was taken out, and the two saplings made capital "skids" on which to roll and shove the body of the buck until he could lift them and tumble it in.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Now for home and Thanksgiving dinner!" He knew nothing whatever about the condition of Owl Creek.

It was not yet time for all the people to be gathered at Squire McGregor's, but more than half of them had arrived. Some of the ladies stayed to talk with Mrs. McGregor and Aunt Betsy in the dining-room and kitchen for a

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

while, but they all went out at last to help Polly and Jack and the other young people stare at the bridge, and wonder whether or not it were going to be swept away. Some driftwood had lodged against it, and the water was rising.

“Father,” said Jack, “can’t we prop it up in some way?”

“Guess not, Jack.”

“I’ve brought it,” said Polly, running up out of breath. “It’s both of ‘em.”

“The clothes-lines? What for, Polly?”

“Why, father, to tie the bridge with. We can hold onto it till Put gets across.”

“No use, Polly. I declare, there he is!”

“Put’s come! Put’s come!” shouted Polly, and they all made a rush for the end of the bridge.

Put was in sight, and he had pulled in the roan team at the top of the long, steep rise on that side of the creek to study the situation.

“They’re all there,” he said, “and they’re scared, too. I can see the bridge quiver. The water’s ‘most up to the planking. Any kind of load’s as likely as not to fetch it down. I’ll try it.”

Down the hill he drove, holding the team in,

IN THE OPEN

and his father shouted: "Walk your horses across, Put."

Their hoofs were almost upon the planks of the bridge, and he saw Polly dancing all around with excitement, while Jack put both hands on his knees to yell with all his might: "Come on, Put! come on!"

He could not hear his grandmother say to his mother: "Oh, Marian, that child! It's awful! He'll be drowned before our very eyes!"

"No, he won't," exclaimed Polly; "he can swim; but there won't be any sugar."

The new stove was working away all alone in the kitchen just then, for every soul in the house had rushed out at the first shout of "Put's coming!"

He was glancing up the river now and saying aloud: "If that log strikes the bridge before I get across, I'm done for."

It was a great, bare trunk of a withered pine-tree, four feet through, a perfect battering-ram, and it was coming down with plunges and rolls, butt-end first, toward the bridge.

The roan team were trembling all over and snorting with terror as they stepped along the shivering planks of the frail structure under

THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

them. The squire's face was flushed when he called out: "Steady, Put!—it's coming!"

Put was standing up, talking to his horses, and he could feel that the bridge was fairly reeling.

Half-way over now, and a side glance showed him the head of the great log careering down with terrible speed.

"Now, Put, the whip! the whip!" shouted the squire, and a great scream arose along the shore as the lash fell and the frightened team plunged madly forward.

"Out of the way! Let 'em run!" shouted Squire McGregor.

"Hurrah for Put!" yelled Jack.

Put heard a great bang and a crash behind him, and the whip came down again, but the horses needed no urging. Hardly were their feet on solid ground when Owl Creek struck the bridge with that log and swept it away as if it had been made of pipe-stems. The wheels followed the hoofs in safety, but they had to follow them for a full mile before Put could pull in his team and turn them homeward.

"Polly," said Jack, "it beats the battle of New Orleans."

"Beats the wolf, too," said Polly.

IN THE OPEN

"Mother," exclaimed the squire, "he did it splendidly. That boy 'll be president some day, sure's you live."

He and the team were completely cooled down when he drove back in front of the house. The new stove was alone yet, for all the other people were out there waiting for Put. As soon as he was near enough to hear her, Polly shouted: "Did you keep the sugar dry?"

"It's all right, Polly. Everything's safe, mother."

"Oh, Put," she said, "I am so thankful! It was such an escape! Where did you sleep last night?"

"In the woods, mother," answered Put, as he sprang to the ground and gave her a tremendous hug. "I had a splendid time. Killed a deer, too, and the powder isn't hurt; but I'm glad I got to the bridge before that log did."

"Killed a deer!" shouted Jack. "Hurrah!"

"A deer!" exclaimed his father. "Well, I'm glad you got here. It 'll be a long while before anybody else drives from here to Martinsville."

Another bridge would have to be built across Owl Creek first.

They all went into the house to hear the par-

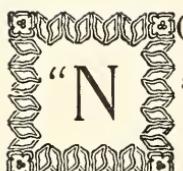
THE OWL CREEK BRIDGE

ticulars of Put's journey, and he had to tell it again and again as the other guests arrived; and when the day was over they all declared that that had been the grandest Thanksgiving dinner ever eaten in the Owl Creek settlement.

III

THE BIG FISH

A First Lesson in Fly-fishing

 O use, Charley. We might as well go home to breakfast."

"We got here early enough."

"I don't believe there's a single trout in the brook."

"If there are any, they don't bite worms early in the morning any more'n they do any other time."

Charley looked mournfully down at his float as it lopped wearily over on one side. The water of the little pool below the foot-bridge over the trout brook was as smooth as a looking-glass, and the float had not so much as wiggled since he dropped it in.

"I don't care much for trout, Jeff."

"I'd rather have some breakfast."

"And after that we'll take the boat and

THE BIG FISH

go out on the pond. We've dug a pile of worms."

Slowly and grudgingly the line was pulled in, but the faces of both the boys brightened the moment they were turned in the direction of breakfast.

Half an hour later they were stopping for a moment to look at a stout, middle-aged man who was standing on the steps of the little village hotel, talking with the landlord. A strap over one shoulder held up a fishing-basket that swung behind his left hip, and in his right hand he carried, all ready for use, the lightest fishing-rod Charley Morris had ever seen. Even Jeff, who was from the city himself, and had looked at such things in the show-windows of the shops, had an idea the stranger must have made a mistake in bringing that plaything into the country.

"It's a trout rod, Charley. If we'd had one like it this morning!"

“ ‘Tisn’t much bigger’n a horsewhip.”

Just then the landlord was saying: “Thar isn’t much in the pond ‘cept perch and sunfish, but you may take something in the creek above. Your best show for trout is to work along the trout brooks as far as the hill, and then cut across to the creek, and fish down. ‘Tain’t far

IN THE OPEN

to cross. To-morrer you can try the brooks beyond the hill. Some of 'em 'll give you a full baskit."

"Hear that, Jeff," whispered Charley. "Just isn't old Galloway a-fooling him! Sending him to fish in that brook! Why, if our cows got at it all at once they'd drink it dry."

Jeff was looking at the high boots the stranger wore over his trousers, and was just saying, "They're for wading, so he won't wet his feet," when Charley looked right up into the face of the "fancy fisherman" from the city, and asked:

"Mister, do you want any worms?"

"Angle-worms, my lad?"

"And grubs? I know where you can dig lots of 'em — where Jeff and I got ours this morning."

"No, thank you, my little man. I don't care for any worms. Would you like to see my bait?"

"Guess I would. Look here, Jeff, he's going to show his bait."

The stout stranger chuckled merrily as he drew from one of his great side-pockets a sort of little book, with a leather cover and flap.

"Jeff, he carries his worms in a pocket-book."

"Flies, my little man—flies."

THE BIG FISH

“Our fish won’t bite at flies, mister; and they won’t hide a hook, neither.”

Charley’s eyes were opening wide, a moment later, as the little book was opened before them.

“Flies? Why, mister, there’s pretty much every kind of bug, except bumblebees. All sorts of hooks, too. If you put them pretty things into the water, you’ll get ‘em wet, and spoil ‘em.”

Again the fat man chuckled.

“Will I? Well, now, you and I’ll run a race. You two boys go ahead, and see which of us ‘ll catch the most fish and the biggest.”

“Come on, Jeff,” shouted Charley, “we’ll beat him!”

But then he suddenly turned again to say:

“Now, mister, you’ve got your scoop-net along. Minners don’t count, do they?”

“No, sonny, minnows won’t count. Only fish that are big enough to eat.”

Charley had never seen a “landing-net” used in his life, but he knew what minnows were good for.

“If we had some, Jeff,” he said, as they hurried along toward the pond, “we could try for some pickerel. There’s some of them left.

IN THE OPEN

Only they've been fished for so much they know enough to let a hook alone."

"Big ones?"

"Some of 'em. There's one awful big one. Black Dan—he's the best fisherman round here, only he's lame of one leg—he says it's the boss fish, and he's fished for him a whole day at a time."

"Did he ever get him to bite?"

"No; but he says he's seen that pickerel smell of his bait, and then swim up to the top of the water and wink at him."

"Wish we could catch him."

"If I had that feller's scoop-net, and could get some minners."

But he had no such thing; and in a few minutes more they were in their boat on the pond, while the stranger was walking fast, for a fat man, across the meadow toward the trout brook.

This was a very narrow, crooked affair, pretty deep in many places, and almost hidden by high grass, trees, and bushes.

"We know there are no fish there," said Charley, confidently.

"Not even trout?"

"Well, yes, maybe there's trout. But they

THE BIG FISH

won't bite. Not even before breakfast. Anyhow, they won't go for a bare hook, with a feather on it."

That seemed sensible, and Charley's own hook now had a worm on it, and so had Jeff's.

"We'll beat him. I know just where to go. We're in the right spot."

Perhaps he did; but before the morning was over he and Jeff had moved their boat into nearly a dozen more that seemed to be just as good.

The "pond" was a sort of miniature lake, and was nearly half a mile long, although it was nowhere very wide. It was supplied by what Mr. Galloway, the landlord, called the "creek"—a pretty stream of water about ten times as large as the trout brook in the meadow.

There were fish in that pond, and it was a pity the man from the city had not known it, and tried for some of them with angle-worms, instead of wasting his time over there in the meadow.

As it was, Jeff and Charley had it all to themselves, and the latter was half glad his city cousin got the first bite.

"Good for you, Jeff!"

"Bull-head! bull-head!"

IN THE OPEN

“Look out for his horns.”

“Ain’t he a whopper!”

“I say, Jeff, did you ever read about flying-fish?”

“Course I have.”

“Well, shouldn’t you think their wings ’d get wet under water?”

“Charley! mind your cork; it’s gone under.”

So it had, and in a moment more he could shout: “I’m even with you. Only mine’s a pumpkin-seed.”

It looked as if the luck of that morning had settled upon the two boys. It was hard to say which of them came in for the largest share of it. Even before they moved their boat the first time they could count three bull-heads, six perch, twice as many sunfish, or “pumpkin-seed,” two shiners, and a sucker. To be sure, none of them were very large fish, but they were all big enough to eat, and would count when they came to compare with the contents of the fat man’s basket.

“That was a pretty big fish-basket,” said Charley. “Most of ’em are flat little things.”

“It’s bigger’n he’ll need for all the fish he’ll find in that brook. Hullo, my bait’s off again!”

“So’s mine. Just a nibble.”



GOOD SPORT

THE BIG FISH

“Six prime worms gone hand-running. Jeff, I guess we might as well pull up. The snappin'-turtles have come for us.”

“Do they skin a hook that way?”

“That’s just what they do. Black Dan says the fish put ‘em up to it. Particularly that there boss pickerel.”

Charley had more than one story to tell about Black Dan, but he pulled up the big stone that was doing duty as an anchor, and off they went to another “tip-top spot.”

It proved so for a while, and there Jeff pulled in his first eel. Then he had a good time, as Charley said, getting the eel off the hook, and untwisting him from the snarl he had got himself into with the fish-line.

“There he goes,” said Charley, “all over the bottom of the boat. Black Dan says an eel just loves to travel round.”

“They’re mean things to catch.”

“I’ve got one. Now I’ll show you.”

Charley knew how to take an eel off a hook, but that one bothered him, and when he finally got him loose, he said:

“I say, Jeff, this won’t do. I’d as lief fish for turtles. Let’s move.”

“Wait a bit. Maybe there’s something else.”

IN THE OPEN

So there was, but not for any great length of time; and as the boys were impatient, they made another move.

They would have given one of their eels to know how the fat man from the city was getting along.

Toward noon their frequent changes brought them away up to the head of the pond, near the mouth of the creek; but they had not been anchored ten minutes before a deep-toned, cheery voice from the bank hailed them with:

“Hey, boys! Having good luck?”

“Pretty good,” said Charley. “Have you caught anything?—anything bigger’n minners?”

“Well, a fish or two. Come ashore and I’ll show ’em. Besides, I want you to give me a lift with your boat.”

The boys were ready enough to have a look into that fish-basket, and the anchor came up in a hurry.

“See,” said the fat man, as he lifted the lid of his basket.

“Why, it’s more’n half full.”

“All trout, too, and some of ’em are big ones.”

“Mister,” said Charley, “did you bring any of them from the city with you?”

THE BIG FISH

“I guess not,” chuckled the fat man. “I got most of ‘em in the brook, but I did fairly well along the creek. Now do you see those bushes at the foot of the steep bank just below the mouth of the creek?”

“Yes,” said Charley; “there’s an awful deep hole right there.”

“Well, I want to float over, slow and silent, so I can throw a fly right under those bushes.”

“You’ll get caught in ‘em.”

“I’ll risk that.”

He sat down on the front seat, and Charley rowed him over as if he were afraid of making a ripple on the water. He and Jeff were almost holding their breath with excitement over what their fat friend meant to do.

“That’s it. Let her float.”

The light, graceful rod swung back, a remarkable length of very fine line went floating through the air, and the boys could see something like a small dragon-fly at the end of it.

“No sinker, Jeff,” whispered Charley.

“It just lit on the water.”

It was a beautiful cast, and the fly fell at the very edge of the bushes, on a dark and shady spot of water with a small eddy in it.

Splash!

IN THE OPEN

What a plunge that was!

"He jumped clean out of the water!" exclaimed Jeff.

"You've lost your hook this time, mister, and your bait, too. That's a pickerel, and we call him the boss fish."

"It's a bigger fish than I had reckoned on," said the stranger, "or I'd have brought a heavier rod and tackle."

"He'll snap any line you've got."

"We'll see."

The pickerel had felt the sharp point of that small hook, and he was now darting off toward the mouth of the creek.

The fat man took it coolly, holding his rod with one hand, while the other rested on the large bright reel that was now spinning around as the fish drew the line out.

The tough little rod was bending, but there was no great strain upon it.

"He won't run far. Here he comes back again."

Not far, indeed, but there were a hundred yards of fine line out before he could begin to reel it in. Then he cried:

"There he goes, down under the bank. Means to sulk. I'll worry him out of that."

THE BIG FISH

“Why don’t you pull him right in?” asked Jeff, excitedly.

“Because he wouldn’t come if I did.”

It was a good while before there seemed to be any prospect of his coming, and the boys were almost tired of the fun of sitting still to see their stout friend let out his line and reel it in again. But at last the pickerel himself began to get a little tired of pulling and being pulled, and was reeled in closer and closer to the boat, while the trout rod bent nearly double.

“He’ll break that line!”

“No, sonny; that’s what the landing-net is for.”

They saw it darted under the gleaming side of the great fish—a lift, a splash, and the prize was floundering on the bottom of the boat.

“Hurrah, boys! We’ve got him.”

“You’ve beat us, mister. I’m just going to go home and catch a lot of flies,” muttered Charley.

Half an hour later they were all standing on the hotel steps, and Black Dan was holding up the pickerel.

“Dat ar’s de boss fish, shuah! And you done cotch him wid a fly and dat ar whipstalk? Was you dar, Charley Morris?”

IN THE OPEN

“I saw him do it, and so did Jeff.”

“Well, ef I ain’t glad he’s done got dat ar pickerel out ob my way. Dat fish has been a soah trial to me!”

And Jeff and Charley had had their own fun, and their first lesson in fly-fishing.

IV

A WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

The Bear Who Stole the Pails

 OT CALLIPER had come out on the mountain-side, with all the rest of them, after blackberries.

 She had picked her little pail full industriously, but she was too fat and too small to climb any farther among the rocks and stumps and bushes, so they had left her there in the shade of the great chestnut-tree, to watch the milk-pails.

Not that there was any milk in them just now, for all three of them were more than half full of great, plump, overgrown berries—blackberries, and the best and largest anybody had ever seen among those mountains. Such a season for berries!

There had been a great fire three years before, and it had burned the woods away, and nobody

IN THE OPEN

knew where the blackberry bushes had come from, but they had moved right in as if the country belonged to them, and they had climbed all over everything.

Dot sat by her pails and looked around, and she was half sorry all the berries near her had been picked and put into the big pails.

All the rest, even Johnny Coyne and Pen Burke, had little pails or else baskets, except Dot's big brother Bob, and he was now away up the mountain-side with a pail that would hold almost as much as a milk-pail.

Dot knew where the others were picking, for they didn't keep still a minute. Jessie Mack and Betsy were down among the rocks at her right, and Molly Calliper was with the boys up there on the left.

Dot was not in the least afraid at being alone, but she did wish she was hungry enough to eat some more berries.

She thought of it, and she tried to, but it was of no use, for all the while she had been picking she had put one berry in her rosy little mouth every time she had put another in her little tin pail.

“Oh, so much berries!” sighed Dot. “They're all our berries, too.”

THE WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

Yes, and Mrs. Calliper meant to dry them all and sell them, and buy some things for Dot and Molly and the baby. Bob had said that he meant to sell his own berries and buy a new gun.

Want of appetite was the trouble with Dot; but there was somebody else in there, among the thickest of those bushes, picking, picking, picking, and eating every one he picked, and that fellow had never seen an hour in all his life when he could not have eaten some more blackberries.

An enormous fellow he was, and fatter for his size than Dot Calliper was for hers. He did not look at all ill-natured, and there was even a sort of funny twinkle in his little black eyes, as he pulled the branches full of fruit to his mouth with his great, clumsy-looking paws.

They were not half so clumsy as they looked, and they were armed with long, sharp, cruel claws that were bent in a curve, like the teeth of the big shell comb Dot's mother bought of the peddler for her back hair. Then, too, when his mouth opened wide, as it did when he made one of his lazy, sleepy yawns, the teeth he showed were something dreadful to look at. Teeth of that size were never needed for eating such

IN THE OPEN

things as blackberries. They looked a great deal more as if they were meant for eating Dot Callipers.

He was evidently very fond of berries, and did not seem to have any doubt but what they all belonged to him. It was just as if he had offered a prize that summer for the bush that would bear the most blackberries, and was now going around among them to see which had won it. Every bush he came to just held out its branches for him to look at; but if Dot had been watching him, she would have seen at once that the fat old rascal never seemed to count the berries at all, but just gathered and swallowed them. How would he be able to tell, when he was done, which bush had done the best for him?

But Dot was not watching him. She had not even seen him yet, and she did not know he was there till he made a great crash among the bushes, when his foot slipped, and he rolled down through half a dozen of them.

“Bob!” exclaimed Dot, “is that you? Did you tumble down?”

There was no answer, and she asked again: “Bob, did you ‘pill your berries?’”

Then she thought she heard something like a

A WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

grunt, such as the pigs made when they were rooting in the garden, and she and Bob went to drive them out, and she said: "Oh, the pids are come! they'll pick all our berries."

Then there came more rustling and crashing among the bushes, and then Dot jumped up and got behind the three big pails, for it was not anything like a pig that came out and began to walk toward the chestnut-tree.

"Oh dear me!" whispered the frightened Dot. "I daren't 'peak to him."

Neither did he say a word to her. He did not even tell her his name was Bruin, and that he was fond of blackberries, but he walked straight forward, and his little black eyes were twinkling more brightly than ever.

As fast as he came forward Dot stepped back, till she stood right against the tree, and then she slipped around behind it, and began to feel that she was perfectly safe.

Bruin looked into one pail after another, as if he saw at once that all the bushes were beaten, and was trying to decide to which of the pails the prize belonged.

"Bob! Bob!" screamed Dot, at the top of her little voice, "there's a bear come, and he's 'tealing our berries."

IN THE OPEN

He was eating them up very fast, that was a fact—for all the world as if they had been picked for his benefit.

Perhaps he would have liked them better with plenty of milk and sugar, but he did not ask Dot for anything of the kind. He just sat down on the grass, and took a big pail up in his lap with his clumsy fore-paws, and then lifted it high enough to bury half his head in it.

Dot saw that he knew exactly how to eat blackberries out of a milk-pail, and she felt sure they would not last him long.

“Molly! Jessie! Betsy! Johnny Coyne! Pen Burke! the bear’s ‘tealing the berries?’”

The other children heard her, and they all began to scream together: “Bear! bear! He’s eating up Dot and the berries!”

Bruin had not so much as said a cross word to Dot, although it was true that he had not thanked her for the berries; but he was just lifting the second pail to his mouth, when Dot’s big brother Bob heard the screaming, and came hurrying down the hill toward the chestnut-tree.

“Der’s one pail left, but he’s eat up the odders,” said Dot, excitedly, as Bob sprang out of the nearest bushes; but to her surprise he did not pay the least attention to the berries

A WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

or the bear. He just caught up Dot herself in his strong arms, and ran away with her.

“Bob, did you lose your pail?”

“Boys! Betsy! Molly!” shouted Bob, “run! run!”

They did run; but they were not like Bob, for every one of them kept tight hold of their berry-pails. They could not run fast among so many rocks and bushes, but they could scramble, and they had not gone far before they heard a great rough voice near them shouting:

“Hullo! What’s arter ye all? Did ye git skeered?”

“Joe—Joe Mix!” exclaimed Bob. “The biggest bear you ever saw in your life. Ain’t I glad you’ve got your gun along!”

“Bar? Whar?”

“Up among the blackberries.”

“And I haven’t a bullet nor a buckshot; nothin’ but small shot. Tell ye what, Bob. Drap that little one. The bar won’t foller ye. You jest run for the house and git yer gun, and tell yer father, and have him come along, and bring some buckshot and slugs for me. Bars is fat now, and we’ll jest gather this one.”

Bob was putting Dot on the ground, when she said to him:

IN THE OPEN

“Make the bear div back the pails, too.”

While Bob was gone, Joe Mix made Dot tell him all about it, but he said:

“I guess I won’t go ahead and scare him off; he’ll stay and pick around.”

“He’ll pick all our berries.”

“Now, Dot, there’s berries enough. We’ll pick him. It won’t do to have him come and pick some of your father’s pigs.”

“Would he pick me?”

“Not unless the berries were all gone, and the nuts, too, and the pigs. But I’m glad Bob got away with ye. He might have mistaken ye for a berry.”

“I wasn’t in a pail; I got behind a tree.”

Dot had been pretty well scared, but Bruin had behaved very well, except about the berries, and she was not half so much frightened as the older children were. Molly and Betsy came and hugged her ever so hard, and Johnny Coyne exclaimed:

“Tell you what, Joe, if I’d had a gun!”

“Oh, don’t I wish I’d had a gun!” echoed Pen Burke; and then they both said they’d bring guns with them the next time they came after berries.

Bob Calliper must have been a good runner,

A WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

and his father, too, for it was wonderful how soon the noise they made among the bushes below told that they were coming.

That was not all, either, for a little distance behind them was Mrs. Calliper herself, all out of breath, with the baby in her arms, and she was not nearly so careful as usual in handing the baby to Molly, she was in such a hurry to hug Dot, and kiss her, and exclaim: 'Dear! dear! dear! My pet! Bears! Oh, Dot, bears! Berries! My precious!"

"The bear dot the berries, mamma."

"Berries, indeed! Who cares for berries!"

Joe Mix asked, the moment Bob came near enough: "Any slugs for me?"

And Bob held out to him a handful of buckshot and rifle-bullets.

Joe had been drawing the old charge out of his gun, and loading it again with more powder, and now he poured in half a dozen big buckshot and three bullets.

"They'll do for slugs. Got yer rifle, Mr. Calliper?"

"No, Bob's brought that. I've got my double-barrelled deer gun, and I've stuck an awful charge into it."

"That 'll do."

IN THE OPEN

“Mary Jane,” said her husband to Mrs. Calliper, “you and the children go on down the hill. Pen, you and Johnny see if you can’t haul out that old stone-boat. It lies up this way, close to the foot of the mountain. We’ll need it to get the bear home.”

“Oh, mamma,” exclaimed Dot, “is the bear comin’ to our house?”

She knew very well that if he did he would eat up all the berries that were spread out on the roof to dry, but her father and Joe Mix and Bob hurried away in the direction of the big chestnut.

Mrs. Calliper would not let any of the children go, but she put down Dot to carry the baby.

Pen and Johnny were a little sulky at not being allowed to help hunt the bear, but they were glad to have something to do, and went on after the stone-boat.

That was a kind of flat sled, made of a thick piece of plank, and used to haul stones on, and they found it just where Mr. Calliper said.

He and Joe and Bob went on up the mountain-side more and more carefully, but they had not far to go, and pretty soon Bob whispered: “There he is; he hasn’t gone.”

A WILD-BLACKBERRY PICKER

“Got a pail on each side of him, and another in his lap,” said his father.

“Now,” said Joe, “we’ve got him. We must all shoot together. Keep yer second barrel a moment, Mr. Calliper. Then give it to him.”

Joe was an old hunter, and he wasn’t good for anything else; but he knew all about bears.

Mrs. Calliper and the children heard the guns go off pretty quickly after that—bang! bang! bang! and then another bang.

“Oh dear! I hope they won’t either of them get hurt!”

There was no danger of that, for the distance had been short, and ever so many slugs and buckshot had struck Dot’s bear almost at the same time. He dropped the pail and rolled over on the ground, and he could not have hurt any one after that. He could not have picked a blackberry.

There came a great shout of triumph down the mountain-side. “Mary Jane! come and look at him!”

The boys heard it, and they tugged harder than ever at the stone-boat.

Such a bear that was!

“Such a berry big bear!” said Dot.

It was hard enough work to get him upon

IN THE OPEN

the stone-boat after it came, and Mr. Calliper and Joe Mix and Bob were so long in dragging that load to Mr. Calliper's house that the children had time to pick the three big pails full of berries again.

Joe Mix sat down on a log in front of the door and mopped his face with his handkerchief, and Pen and Johnny took a useless pull at the stone-boat with the bear on it, and Mrs. Calliper stood behind her husband and hugged the baby.

They had put the three pails of berries down only a few feet from the nose of the bear as he lay on the stone-boat, and Jessie Mack and Betsy went and stood behind the pails, where they were safe, but Dot wasn't a bit afraid of that bear now. She toddled close up to her father, as he stood at the head of the stone-boat, and looked down on the great, furry berry-picker.

“He didn't pick me, papa.”

“No, Dot,” remarked Joe Mix; “he couldn't sit up now ef you brung him all the berries you've got.”

V

CAMPING OUT

Partridges and Fish

WHAT am I a-stoppin' for? Why, this 'ere's the end of the road. It's as fur as I can git, even with one hoss and a buck-board."

It looked like it, for the wood road had been getting dreadfully scrubby for a mile or so.

"Wade, was it like this when you and your father and the rest were here before?"

"A good deal like it. How far are we from Pot Lake now, Mr. Jones?"

The queer-looking old teamster was busily unfastening several small packages from the broad "buck-board" of his rude wagon, but he looked gruffly up to say: "'Baout a mile 'n' a half."

"It's all of that, Sid, but it's of no use to grumble. We've got to foot it the rest of the way. It's a plain enough path."

IN THE OPEN

“Foot it! And lug all that?”

“Guess you’ll be glad there ain’t any more of it afore ye git thar.”

Mr. Jones was right, for they were both of them glad already, considering how warm a day it was.

Neither of the boys was much over sixteen, but Wade Norton looked the older of the two, although his companion was fully as tall and strong. Standing together, they made a good “specimen pair” of vigorous, bright-eyed, self-reliant youngsters.

In three minutes more Mr. Jones and his pony and his buck-board were out of sight among the trees, and Sid and Wade were left to their own resources.

It was seven miles due south, and a good deal longer by the road, to the nearest clearing, and all to the north of them was wilderness—woods, lakes, and mountains.

“Now, Wade, how ’ll we divide the load? There’s a heap of it.”

“Guess we won’t divide it. I’ll show you—here’s the hatchet.”

“Go ahead. I’m a greenhorn yet. What are you going to do?”

Wade was too busy to answer, but he quickly

CAMPING OUT

had a pair of very slender ash saplings hacked down, trimmed clean, and laid side by side about two feet apart. To these he tied a couple of cross-sticks, six feet from each other. Then he spread his blanket on the ground, laid the frame in the middle, folded the blanket across, and pinned it firmly.

“Looks like a litter,” said Sid.

“That’s what it is. Put the tin box of hard-tack in the middle. It’s the heaviest thing we’ve got; weighs ten pounds. Now the bacon; that only weighs five. Now the other things. The guns ain’t loaded; lay ‘em along the sides. And the fishing- rods. Now we’re ready.”

One boy in front between the poles, and one behind, and it was a pleasant surprise to Sid to find how easy it worked. Still, it was a dreadfully long and warm mile and a half over that rough forest path before they came out on the slope that led down to the blue waters of Pot Lake.

“It’s just beautiful,” said Sid, as they set down their load for a rest and a look.

“Hist! Let me get my gun.”

A cartridge was slipped in like a flash; and then there came another flash, and a report.

IN THE OPEN

“Thought you said it was unsportsmanlike to kill a partridge sitting?”

“So it is, my boy; but it’s a question of dinner. Our breakfast was an early one. Look at ‘em, will you?”

Sid was looking, and there was a very strong suggestion of dinner in that pair of barely full-grown young birds. Fat, plump, the very thing for a boy whose breakfast had been eaten early. There was a sort of natural “open” on that side of the little lake, and Wade led the way straight to it.

“Just as I expected. The old shanty’s knocked all to pieces. The boards and the nails are there, though. They may be good for something.”

“What next? Shall I unpack?”

“Hold up, Sid. Yes, there’s the spring. Down yonder; that’s where we’ll pitch our tent.”

“Needn’t do that, yet awhile.”

“First thing always. We’re not in camp till the tent’s up.”

“Go ahead. Don’t you wish you had the tent-poles here now?”

“Not if I had ‘em to carry besides the other things. We can cut all we want.”

As they talked they walked, and they were

CAMPING OUT

now standing by the spring, on the slope, not more than a hundred yards from the shore.

“There’s the place for the tent.”

“Isn’t one spot as good as another?” asked Sid.

“You don’t want to sleep slanting, do you? That isn’t all, either. That little hump of ground in front of it’s a tiptop fireplace.”

“Don’t look much like one.”

“You’ll see. Come on and let’s cut some tent-poles.”

Two five-foot sticks, each with a “crotch” at the upper end, were soon set in the ground about six feet apart, and a ridge-pole laid across them.

“You haven’t set ‘em deep enough,” said Sid. “They’d go over too easy.”

“No they won’t. The strength of a tent is in the canvas and pegs, not in the poles,” said Wade.

He was unrolling the great square piece of strong but light “cotton duck,” and in a moment more it was flapping over the poles.

“Stretch it well, and peg it strong. That tent won’t blow down.”

“Can’t stand up in it.”

“That isn’t what it’s for. In with the sup-

IN THE OPEN

plies. The sun's as bad as rain would be, for part of 'em, spite of the tin boxes."

"Nothing extra—not even butter."

"Butter? There's one roll of it, but the bacon's the butter for us. Now for the butcher-knives. We must ditch our tent."

"What for?"

"To drain away the water, if it rains. We must cut a V."

The apex of the V was cut pretty deeply on the slope above the tent, and the arms were cut around it till they led out below.

"Water doesn't run uphill," said Sid. "We're drained. What next?"

"Fire."

"A day like this? Are you going to cook right away? I'd rather try the lake for some fish."

"Of course we will. But it takes an hour for an open fire to be fit to cook by. Got to have plenty of coals and ashes."

Fuel was plentiful enough, and a rousing fire was speedily blazing on the little hump of ground, a rod in front of the tent.

"Not near enough to set anything on fire. If that hump hadn't been there we'd have made one."

CAMPING OUT

As it was, he had levelled it on top a little, and the surface so made was barely two feet across.

Sid was a little curious about such a fireplace, but decided to wait and see what his friend meant.

Wade's father was an old army officer, and had taken his boy with him on more than one "camping-out" excursion, while Sid was taking his very first lesson.

"That 'll do. Now for some fish. You go ahead, while I pluck the partridges."

"Guess not. I can do that as well as you can. Give me one of 'em."

It was easy work to strip the tender game and hang it in the tent, but the boys were thoroughly tired of mere "going into camp" by the time they started for the lake.

"Hullo, Sid! If there isn't the old dug-out floating yet!"

"That thing out there by the snag? We can't get at her."

"Can't we? Can't you swim as far as that? I can."

"Swim? Oh yes, of course we can. Shall you go now?"

"Why, no; not till we get in fish enough for dinner."

IN THE OPEN

"That's it. We're Indians. Got to fish, hunt, or starve—or live on hard-tack and bacon."

Pot Lake was a great place for trout, and both of the boys knew how to handle a rod.

"No three-inchers!—none of your speckled minnows!" shouted Sid, as he landed a half-pound beauty.

"Here comes a bigger one! Oh, but isn't this fun?"

"Better fun than going into camp."

"Or tramping through the woods with a load. But don't you begin to feel hungry?"

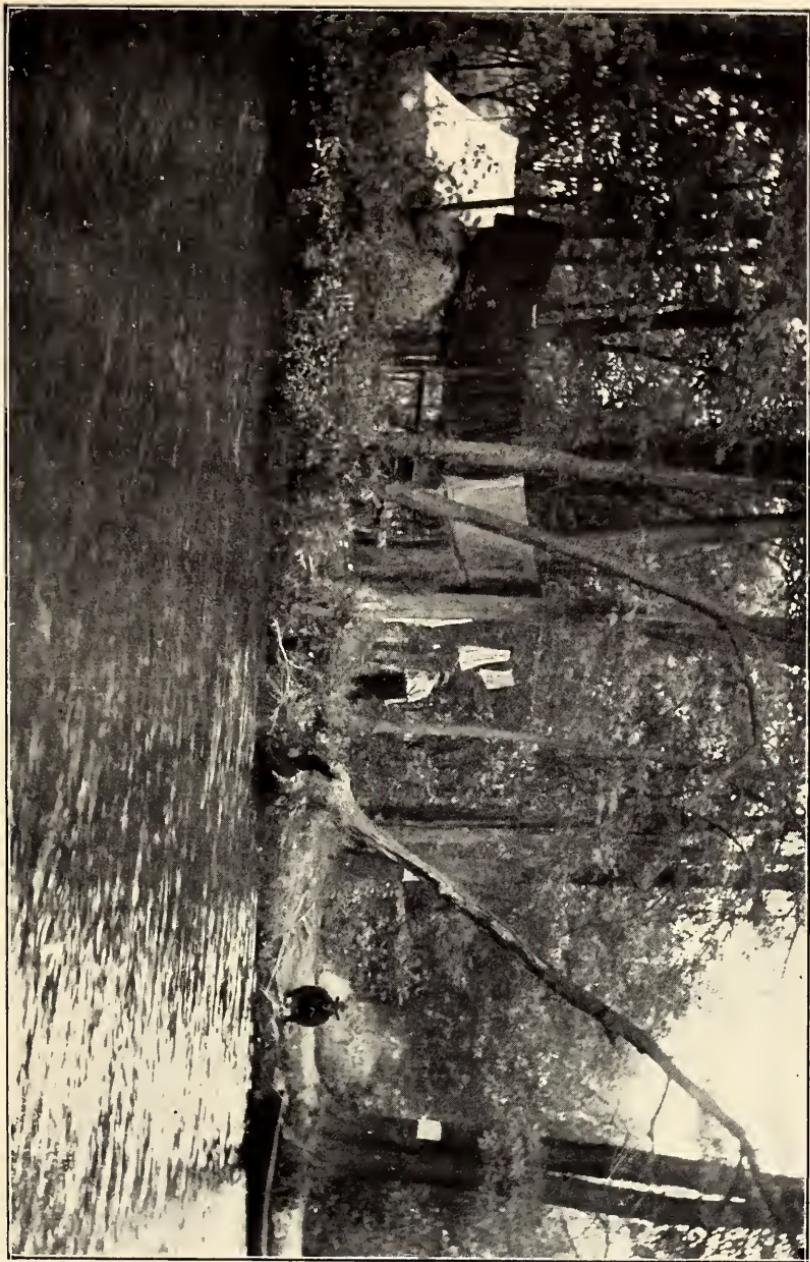
"Begin? Well, you may say begin if you want to. Seems to me I began a little while after breakfast," replied Sid.

They had caught more fish than any two boys could eat; but Sid's first remark on reaching the tent with them was: "I do hate cleaning fish."

"Clean fish? Out here in the woods? While we're Indians? You wait till I find a bass-wood-tree."

There were plenty of lindens, or basswoods, in that vicinity, and the broad, flat leaves were as good as brown paper to wrap up a trout in, fold over fold.

The fire had now burned long enough to sup-



THE FIRST DAY IN CAMP

CAMPING OUT

ply Wade with a heap of hot ashes, which he raked out on one edge of it. All the little coals were carefully poked aside, the leaf-covered trout were put down and smothered an inch deep in their ashy bed, and then a pile of glowing cinders was raked over them.

“They’ll cook, Sid. You go to the lake for a kettle of water, while I get out the frying-pan and the coffee-pot.”

“Frying-pan! We won’t need any bacon with all those fish and the partridges.”

“We’ll only broil one bird, but we must have some hard-tack. I’ll show you.”

Sid went for the water, but when he got back Wade was putting the frying-pan on a bed of coals, with a couple of thin slices of bacon in it.

“They look lonely,” said Sid.

“They’ll have company enough. This coffee smells first rate.”

“No milk, Wade, and nothing to settle it with.”

“I thought I’d surprise you, Sid. I’ve brought some little cans of condensed milk.”

“Why not a big can?”

“Spoils after it’s opened, just like other milk.”

“Next thing to having a cow. But oh, won’t the coffee be muddy!”

IN THE OPEN

“I guess not. There, the bacon’s beginning to fry.”

Half a dozen ship biscuit, hard as dinner-plates, were dipped for a moment in the water, and quickly transferred to the frying-pan.

It was wonderful how puffed up and soft they became, and what a fine flavor of bacon improved their taste when it came time to eat them.

Wade was at his coffee-pot before that, however.

Two heaping table-spoonfuls of the ground coffee were first poured into one of the tin cups, which were all the “table crockery” in that camp, and just covered with cold water.

That had been done before the bacon was put on, and now the coffee-pot full of water was sitting on a bed of coals and beginning to steam.

“She’s boiling!” shouted Sid.

In went the contents of the tin cup, and on went the cover.

“Let her boil awhile.”

“The hard-tack’s a-swelling.”

“The fish must be done, too. Now for settling.”

The cover of the coffee-pot was lifted, and half a cupful of cold water was suddenly dashed

CAMPING OUT

in, and then the pot was lifted from the coals to the grass.

“Let her stand a bit. Now for the fish. Have your tin plate ready.”

“Ain’t they splendid!”

So they were, when they were dug out from the ashes, their leafy coats removed; and Sid discovered that by a careful use of his fork and fingers all the parts of the fish that he did not want seemed to come away together. A little salt and pepper improved both them and the hard-tack, and the coffee poured out beautifully clear and strong.

Just as he and Sid were getting ready to begin their meal, however, Wade took one of the partridges and spread him flat on the forks of a long, crooked branch he had cut.

“That ’ll hold him just high enough above the coals.”

“Yes, but you stuck him right into the heat, first thing.”

“Always. That shuts up his outside coat, so he won’t lose all his juice in broiling. Cook him slow, now. I’ve put a little salt and pepper on him, and a piece of butter as big as a chestnut. He’ll do.”

“We can’t eat all we’re cooking.”

IN THE OPEN

“Take our time to it.”

So they did, and Wade went so far as to clean a small trout and show Sid how to fry him.

“Always break up a little hard-tack fine as you can, and sprinkle it on the bottom of the frying-pan as soon as your bacon fat begins to smoke. Then your fish won’t stick, unless your pan’s too hot. You must look out for that.”

Dinner was over at last, and then the boys went to the edge of the woods for a couple of strong forked stakes and a cross-stick to hang their kettle on.

“What are you setting the crotches so far from the fire for?” asked Sid.

“So they won’t burn down. Besides, when you don’t want your kettle on the fire, you can just slide it along; needn’t take it off every time.”

“Look, Wade—the sky isn’t as clear as it was.”

“That’s so. May have rain. We must cut our bedding and lay in our wood-pile.”

Plenty of small hemlock boughs were heaped on the bottom of the tent to spread their blankets on; and Sid almost rebelled at the amount of dry wood Wade insisted on piling up.

CAMPING OUT

"May rain all day to-morrow, Sid. We must catch a lot of fish to-night."

"What are all these great slabs of bark for? Kindling?"

"I'll show you. It's mean work starting an open fire with wet wood."

The first day in camp was clearly a day of hard work; but the fish seemed to bite better than ever as the sun went down, and the boys had each a capital "string" before supper-time.

The old dug-out canoe was swam after and brought to the shore.

"We can use it, Sid. It was a tottish thing to get into, till father nailed a keel-board on the bottom of it. We'll bail it out to-morrow. I'm too tired for that sort of fun now."

"So am I. Let's go for supper. Let me make the coffee this time."

"All right. But don't put any more wood on the fire. I'll broil some fish instead of frying them. Clean 'em, and split 'em down along the backbone inside, and they'll lie flat. Spread 'em on a forked stick, so they won't touch the coals and ashes. Season 'em just a little."

Sid decided afterward that there was very little to be said against broiled trout.

They were both of them tired enough to go

IN THE OPEN

to bed early, but it was hardly eight o'clock when the raindrops began to patter on the tent cover.

"We must keep our fire, Sid," said Wade.

He was raking it from the top of the "hump" as he spoke, and putting down there several solid pieces of dry wood. These he covered with the live coals and burning fragments, and these again with ashes; and then he made over all a sort of conical "wigwam" of his slabs of bark, putting flat stones against them at the bottom, so they would not easily blow away.

"Couldn't do that with too big a fire. Always make a camp fire as small as possible. So my father told me. That'll keep, if it rains ever so hard."

"It's going to do that. Will our fish be safe?"

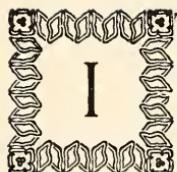
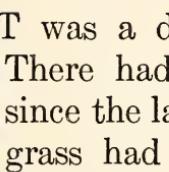
"Hanging in the water by the canoe? Of course they will. Who'll steal 'em? They'll be fresh, too, in the morning. We can't live on fish, though. I can show you twenty ways of cooking birds."

They had crept into the tent now, and the rain was pelting harder and harder. But the tent was well ditched, and they were dry and comfortable.

VI

BEN'S BLAZE

A Tale of a Prairie Fire

T was a dry spring on the prairie. I There had been almost a drought since the last of February. The new grass had made a small start, but last year's grass stood above it, dry and brown, and above that nodded the tall heads of the dead rosin-weeds.

Mr. Carr Marrow said to his wife and to his son Ben: "It's going to be the best kind of a year for corn. There's rain a-coming some day. This 'ere dry spell is just the thing to get the ground in order, and to do your ploughing, and pop your seed in early. Now, Ben, my boy, we'll have some fun, and you needn't even call it work."

Ben knew what that meant. He rolled over on the floor and took a look at Dusty. The

IN THE OPEN

look meant: "You're a dog that won't have any boy with him to-morrow. All that corn's got to be broken down."

It came out just so. The corn-fields of that farm reached out from the fenced wheat-fields near the house right into the open prairie. Beyond them stretched the swells and the levels, and these had not changed, except for new ant-hills, since the last drove of buffaloes left them.

Outside of Carr Marrow's ploughed land there was but one break in the prairie grass, and that was at Hiller's Grove, not much more than a mile away. Hiller's house was in the grove, and his farm was all around it, and neither Ben nor his father knew that "old man Hiller," as everybody called him, was already busy with his last year's corn-stalks.

Ben remembered that he had had to reach up, in corn harvest, for most of the ears he had pulled from the tall stalks he had worked among. He had gone home every night, until snow came, with a great ache in his arms, and the memory of it came back to him. It helped to give him a feeling of pleasure when he and his father, with a span of horses and a long, heavy pole, went out after the next morning's breakfast to break down all those corn-stalks. They were

BEN'S BLAZE

old enemies of his. They had robbed him and Dusty of many a good rabbit hunt, and now they were to be knocked over and burned up.

A horse was hitched to each end of the pole, and Ben and his father each drove a horse. It was no joke for the horses, and Carr Marrow was just the man to do all the work there was in one day. It took him and Ben two whole days' hard dragging to crush the tall ranks of all that corn. It was just what old Mr. Hiller was doing, but Mrs. Hiller drove his other horse for him, and said, "Sakes alive!" every time she saw a rabbit. The six little Hillers took turns in coming out to see the corn go down, but not one of them was big enough to have any real grudge against the corn-stalks.

Ben Marrow felt that he had more grudge, rather than less, at the end of the second day. Dusty was also a weary dog, for he had barked in vain all the time. Either he had chased thirty-two rabbits or he had chased one rabbit thirty-two times, and he did not care a bark which.

Ben looked back at the long rows of broken stalks, and said to his father: "There'll be some fun in seeing 'em burn."

"They'll go like tinder, Ben. We must look

IN THE OPEN

out that the fire doesn't get away from us. There's an awful amount of rosin-weed in all that grass yonder."

Ben knew that, for he had scraped an unusual supply of "gum" from the stalks of it. He had found some beads of rosin that were bigger than buckshot, and rosin will burn. He had touched off a great many rosin-weeds just to see them blaze, and they had never disappointed him. They all had burned successfully.

Mr. Carr Marrow told his wife to have breakfast early that third morning, and she did so; but when Ben awoke it was because Dusty had put his fore-paws on the edge of the bed and tried to pull away the pillow.

"Just so, Dusty," said Ben. "We've got to burn all that corn-field over to-day."

Dusty did not know what the fun was to be, but he danced away toward the corn-field. Mr. Marrow followed, with a wisp of paper in one hand, and Ben's mother followed with another wisp. She said to Ben:

"I do just want to see it get well agoing. There's a good wind, and it 'll burn first rate."

If Dusty had ever before seen corn-stalks on fire he had forgotten it, to judge by the way he tore around after the blazes began to creep along

BEN'S BLAZE

the down rows. He was a dog in a new business, with but a dim idea of the amount and kind of barking demanded. He therefore put in all he had and of every kind he knew.

"I'll plant some more fire, mother," said Ben, as soon as the first blaze was well a-going. "That one 'll grow."

A corn-stalk with some husks on it made a good enough torch to plant fire with, and that was where the fun came in, and more than a little brisk work with it. The wind helped well, and drove the fire along the rows, but all scattered clumps had to be especially lighted, all scattered stalks had to be thrown into the blaze, and all skipped spaces had to be cared for, so that the field would be clean burned, ready for ploughing.

Every kind of game got away from that field in a hurry, and Dusty had nothing of duty left him but his barking at that fire. Mrs. Marrow went back to the house after awhile, saying something about corned-beef for dinner, and she did not know that Mrs. Hiller was getting ready precisely that sort of thing, with pork and cabbage and turnips. There was plenty to eat among all the farms along that prairie, but the Hiller family were to have something with

IN THE OPEN

their dinner, and had not the ghost of an idea that there was anything coming.

A great deal of industrious burning had been done before ten o'clock, and the wide stretch of field behind Ben and his father was marked by long rows of gray-black ashes, with little stumps of charred corn-stalks sticking up, four feet apart each way. Ben said it looked, for all the world, like a great gridiron, and then he added: "Father, can Dusty and I go and fire the field beyond the road?"

"I don't care if you do. The wind's kind o' gone down. Only you just look out and see that it doesn't get away from you."

"Du-u-usty!" shouted Ben, and in an instant a quantity of ashes and hair, very much like a dog, came bounding across the smoking lines from the other side of the field. Ben broke off a stalk that had upon it the withered husks of two large ears close together. He lighted them at the nearest blaze, and sprang toward the outlying field that was as yet unscorched. Neither the road nor the corn-field had any fence to put in his way. Dusty picked up a stalk on his own account, but forgot to light it, and dashed away after his master.

From row to row, in quick succession, the lit-

BEN'S BLAZE

tle flames flashed up as Ben worked on. When he began the air was almost still, and he said it was too quiet altogether for rapid burning. Perhaps it was, and it made him work so much the harder that he hardly noticed a sudden change that came.

He and his father had been raising such clouds of smoke that they had not seen how fast the clouds of another sort were gathering in the sky. A sudden puff of wind from the wrong direction all but blinded Ben, set Dusty a-sneezing, and made Mr. Marrow cover his face with both hands. Another from the opposite point of the compass caught the fires that had been lighted and whirled them fiercely away along the down rows toward the prairie.

"Look our for your fire, Ben!" shouted Mr. Marrow. "I've got to 'tend to mine. Don't let 'em get away from you."

Ben sprang to his work with a will, stamping out blaze after blaze, and Dusty barked like mad, but it was too late. One heavy row escaped them. Either it was drier, or more combustible, or more mischievous, for it carried its blaze as if it had been a racer. Before Ben even got near it the flashes were springing up and away before the gusts of wind, almost at the

IN THE OPEN

edge of the prairie. Right at the end of that row of stalks a thick clump of rosin-weeds stood waiting, nodding eagerly to the fire to hurry along.

“Father!” shouted Ben. But at that moment the nearest rosin-weed reached out and caught a finger of fire from a flaming bunch of husks, and in one great flash and flare Ben’s work had gotten utterly away from him.

“Oh!” was all Carr Marrow could exclaim until after a long breath, and then he added: “I was half afraid of it. Mine’s getting away from me. Old man Hiller’s place is right in the track of it. Just see it go!”

It was well worth seeing, for the rosin-weeds had lighted the long, brown grass around them, and the varying, eddying gusts of the coming storm had carried the fire in all directions.

A widening wall of smoke and blaze higher than a man’s head swept on over the prairie. Every here and there it bounded twice as high over bunches of tall grass and weeds, and it roared with furious delight at having so much freedom and such quantities of wind and rosin to work with.

Old man Hiller had said to his wife that morning: “We won’t do our burning to-day. I

BEN'S BLAZE

don't like the looks of the weather." And when he saw the smoke rise at Carr Marrow's, he added: "Just like him. He'll fire the whole prairie if a gust comes."

He was sitting in the house mending a piece of old harness, when one of the small Hillers out at the door shouted "Father!" and the next younger screamed "Mother!" and the next older bawled "Fire!" and two others began to squall without saying what it was for; but Thomas Jefferson Hiller was twelve years old, and all he said was: "Good! it's coming right this way, too."

Mr. and Mrs. Hiller were out at the door in a twinkling. She lifted both her hands, and said, "Sakes alive!" twice; but her husband only pulled up his trousers an inch, and remarked: "It's Carr Marrow's work. It's got away from him. It 'll save us any work with our corn."

"It 'll burn us out of house and home," groaned his wife—"it 'll burn us all up."

"Don't get down into the well yet," said he. "Perhaps it won't do any hurt. It might, though."

Thomas Jefferson Hiller had three dogs, besides four puppies, and they all came out to stand by him and whine about that fire as the

IN THE OPEN

first smoke came drifting down the wind. None of the Hillers knew that back beyond that terrible rolling wall of black and red there was a dog too full of smoke to bark any more, and a boy half ready to cry because he could not break through and tell his neighbors that the fire was coming to burn them all up.

The clouds in the sky came leaning down to lock hands with the dense volumes of smoke from the prairie fire, and the wind drove them all forward vigorously.

“That’s it!” shouted old man Hiller.

It was a vivid flash of lightning that went flickering in among the long tongues of rosin-weed flame just as Carr Marrow said, breathlessly:

“It’s ‘most there, Ben. There won’t be a smitch left of Hiller’s Grove. It ’ll roast ‘em all alive!”

A crashing peal of thunder answered him, and then came down the rain.

“I never saw it pour so in all my life,” said Mrs. Hiller, as she caught up her youngest child and hurried into the house. “Sakes alive!”

Thomas Jefferson Hiller dropped a puppy, and exclaimed: “My! But it’s bad for the fire.”

Not many minutes after that Ben Marrow

BEN'S BLAZE

came dripping along into the Hiller front door, and Dusty dripped just behind him, and Carr Marrow leaned over both of them to say:

"Well, old man Hiller, you've had the narrowest kind of a 'scape."

"Well, yes; I reckon so," said Mr. Hiller. "I was kind o' hoping it 'd get to my corn-stalks before the rain came on, but it didn't. Is yours mostly done?"

"Mostly. But wasn't you afraid it might do some mischief?"

"Burn us up? Well, yes. Perha-aps. So it might. Come in and get dry. I was thinking of the stalks. It 'd have cleaned them, fine."

"Ben," said Thomas Jefferson Hiller, "you're awful wet."

"Yes; but wasn't that an awful fire? It got away from me."

"It was just fine! It stopped only three rods beyond our east fence, and right at the edge of our corn. Stalks all down and ready for it, too."

The rest of the Hiller family did not seem to feel like mourning over that fact, and their cat drove Dusty out of the house. There was no harm done, after all.

VII

A LONG SWIM; *Or, The Drifting Boat*

OOK here, Sime, old Purdy might have told us he'd taken away his oars."

“Well, yes; but there was a kind of a grin on his face when he told us we might have it. Not another loose boat!”

It was a solemn fact. Every skiff along the beach but “old Purdy’s” was fastened by chain and padlock and stake, to express the objections of its owner against its use by stray boys.

“No fun going in for a swim in this shallow water. Only a wading-place.”

“Barry, there’s a board. That’ll do for us. We can paddle her out far enough.”

It was a lost fragment of clapboard about four feet long, and with no house to it. Nobody could guess how it got there; but in three min-

A LONG SWIM

utes more the clumsy, flat-bottomed skiff was being slowly propelled away from the beach, out toward the deeper water of the lake.

Sime Hopkins and Barry Gilmore had reached, to judge from the remarks they made, that precise point in their aquatic practice when your common small boy 'long-shore swimming is a thing to be looked down upon, and a lake of some size, or a section of the Atlantic, was required for any fun of theirs.

The day was warm, the water as smooth as a pane of glass, and there was a faint haze over the sky. The very model of a day for a perfect swim.

The boat, too, had evidently been built for it. She was broad enough not to tip too easily if you were climbing in, and the wide seat at each end was just the arrangement for diving.

"This 'll do, Sime. Pity we didn't bring an anchor."

"Water's a hundred feet deep out here. How far are we from shore?"

"Don't know. Maybe it's half a mile. Maybe it's more. Could you swim it?"

"Guess not, Barry. Perhaps I could. But I don't care to try. Not unless the boat came

IN THE OPEN

along. A fellow's legs might give out, or he might take a cramp."

"My legs would peg out, sure, long before I got there."

They were a very good pair for a boy of fifteen, and in a moment more they were in the air, as he sprang from the stern of the boat, and went in, capitally well, head first.

"That was a good header!" shouted Sime.
"I'm coming!"

Come he did, and they found the water just about right for them. Not a trace of a chill in it, in spite of the fact that the lake was largely supplied by springs from the bottom. Out there, of course, there could be no weeds to catch their feet in, and there was very little to be suggested by way of improvement.

"Fore we get too tired, Barry, let's try a longer swim."

"Come on. Only don't let's go too far."

They were headed toward the shore, and they were not looking back, when Barry exclaimed: "There's a ripple, Sime. The wind's rising."

"Barry, look at the boat!"

"She's drifting out. The wind's off shore."

The boys looked at each other for a moment

A LONG SWIM

with very serious faces; but they were brave fellows, and there was no time for hesitation.

“She isn’t so very far, Sime.”

“But she’s drifting. No telling how far she’ll go. We mustn’t risk it.”

“Shore’s too far. Can’t do it. We can catch the boat.”

“The wind’s rising, Barry.”

“Choose, Sime—shore or boat.”

“Shore for me. Choose for yourself. See how she drifts!”

“You can’t reach the shore, Sime. Besides, I want my clothes. I’m going for the boat.”

“No time to talk. Good-bye, Barry.”

Sime Hopkins felt a great sob rising as he struck out for the shore, and it was every bit as much on Barry’s account as on his own, but he had to choke it down.

“Straight swimming now, and no nonsense. How plainly I can see the city!”

That is, he could see the steeples of it, some two miles from the shore he hoped to reach; and below them, he knew, were the roofs of houses, and under the roofs of two of those houses were Barry Gilmore’s mother and his own.

Steadily, regularly, without a motion too much or a pull too hard—for he was thinking

IN THE OPEN

very closely what it was best to do in such a case—Sime swam on, until a dull feeling in his arms warned him of coming weariness.

“On my back now for a few rods. It ’ll change the work, and rest me. I can see the boat, but I can’t see Barry. The wind is blowing harder.”

All that time, however, Barry had been doing precisely what his friend had done, only that he had watched more anxiously the increasing ripple on the water.

“She isn’t so very far,” he had said to himself at first. “I do wish Sime had come with me. He can’t reach that shore, swim his best. It ’ll be an awful thing to tell.”

A couple of minutes later he was muttering: “That was a harder puff. How she does drift! Seems to me I don’t get an inch nearer. If it blows much worse, I’ll have to follow her to the upper end of the lake.”

That was nearly six miles away, and the thought of it made the warm water he was swimming in seem several degrees colder. Barry’s lips closed hard, and his teeth set against each other, and he measured his every stroke to make it tell.

Then his turn came to try a “back swim and

A LONG SWIM

a rest," and he, too, said: "I can see the shore and the city, but I can't get a glimpse of Sime. There! isn't that his head?—that black thing? Guess it is; it's moving. Yes, it's him!"

It was indeed the back of Sime's head, but the boy under it was saying to himself: "The shore's as far away as it ever was. I'd no idea we had paddled out such a distance. Reach it? I *will* reach it. Never swam so far in my life, but I *must* reach it."

Still, it was getting to be weary work, and before him lay what seemed an interminable reach of glittering ripples. He was breathing hard, his arms and legs were moving with less force than at first, and his progress through the water was slower and slower.

"Can I do it? It's got to be done. I'll tread water a moment for a change. I can't see Barry. Hurrah! it's the shallows!"

As he dropped his feet they came down upon smooth sand, for all that end of the lake was a very gentle slope from the beach. The water was up to his neck, but the bottom was there, and Sime's heart bounded with a great throb of relief.

"Barry? I must wade in fast now. No boat when I get there; no help."

IN THE OPEN

It was a forlorn outlook, and Sime even thought for a moment of all his clothing away out there in the skiff. Then he thought of Barry Gilmore, and hardly anything else, until the increasing shallowness of the water enabled him to wade faster, and then to break into what was almost a run. It was a great splash at all events, and Sime was quickly shouting to some one on the beach a half-breathless account of Barry's danger.

"Why didn't ye wait for the oars? I was a-comin' down with 'em. Wanted a swim myself, and thought I'd fool ye a little. What! Barry a-swimmin' after the skiff? There's Jim Burr's boat. Quick! jump in!"

"It's locked."

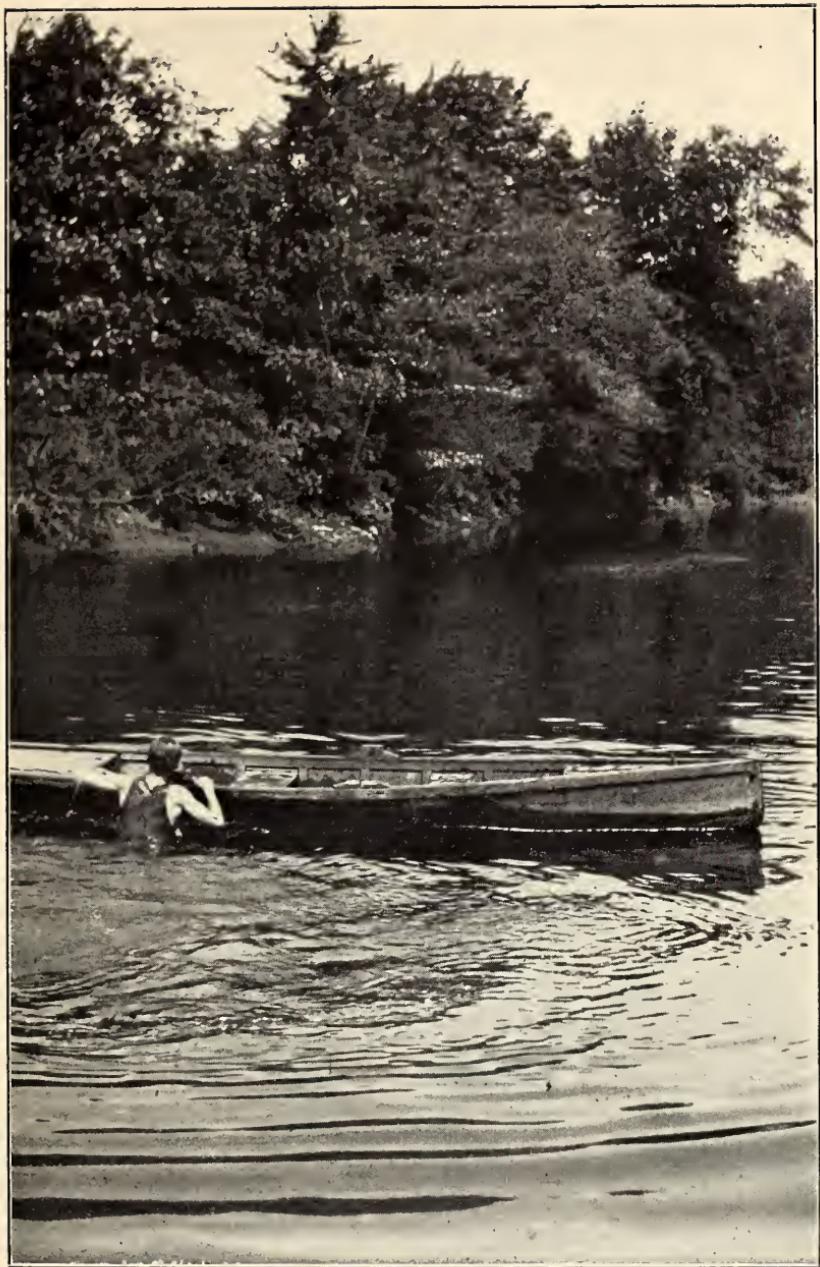
"Locked? Well, I'll jest unlock it."

The key Purdy used was of limestone, and it may have weighed twenty pounds. It "opened Jim Burr's padlock for good and all," while Sime was getting in; and then how Purdy did row!

"We'll be too late."

"Shut up, Sime. Don't talk to me. It's jest awful."

It came very near it, for Barry Gilmore's brave, earnest face was getting white when he



“I CAN’T CLIMB IN!”

A LONG SWIM

at last discovered that he was really drawing nearer the runaway boat.

"The wind is rising. I'm almost gone. Couldn't swim two rods farther."

Yes, the wind was indeed blowing harder, but the direction of it had been for some time changing, as it is apt to do before a summer storm. The first "surface current" of air had lost its breath, and the stronger blast which was really to bring the cloud and rain was coming from the other way. So was the skiff it caught and carried along, and Barry hardly understood it.

"I'm swimming pretty fast yet, in spite of everything. Wish I knew about Sime. Just a little farther."

Oh, how difficult were those last few strokes! When Barry faintly rested one hand upon the gunwale of the skiff, it required a great effort to lift the other beside it.

"I can't climb in, now I've got here. What shall I do?"

Of course he could not have climbed in, if he had been obliged to lift himself all the way up, but every ounce of weight he put upon the side of the boat brought it down farther and farther, until it was hardly two inches above the roughening water.

IN THE OPEN

“Now for it!” All the strength he had left went into that last effort, and then Barry was lying on the bottom of the boat, with his wet head on the shining front of Sime Hopkins’s shirt bosom.

He did not try to guess how long he lay there. Even after he could have moved he had no heart to lift his head and look toward the shore.

At last, just after he had covered his eyes with both hands, there came upon his ears the sound of oars, as if some very zealous rower were pulling for a prize in some regatta, and behind that sound was another, as if some fellow had suddenly burst out crying.

A heavy “bump” against the side of the skiff.

“Here he is! Oh, Barry!”

“Sime, is that you? Don’t say a word, Sime—I can’t.”

It was some little time before either of them could say much, but they had both learned just about how far they could swim; and old Purdy sat there in his stolen boat, his rough face all one redness and radiance. All even he could find to say was:

“Ain’t I glad! Jim Burr won’t mind my bustin’ of his lock a mite; but I’ll git him another.”

VIII

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

A Queer Search for Sap

ELL, yes, Jerry," remarked Salina Meadows, coaxingly, "old Mr. Wire 'll be glad to have anybody come to see him that knows as much about sugar as you do."

"It's all the hobby he's got," said her brother Phin. "He makes the best maple sugar in all these parts—whitest and cleanest. Biggest lot of it, too."

"I've heard him say," added Rush Potts, "that no man was ever too old to learn. Glad we could bring you along."

"There isn't much about sugar I don't know," replied Jerry Buntley, modestly, with a pull at his dog-skin gloves to make them fit tighter. "You just ought to see a real sugar plantation once."

IN THE OPEN

“I would like to,” said Hannah Potts, all the red in her rosy face coming to the surface to meet the wind that blew in her face from the direction of old Mr. Wire’s great forest on the hill-side.

They were all cuddling down in Elder Meadows’s great box sleigh, and Phin Meadows was putting the sorrel span along the road in a way that made their bells dance lively enough, for the March thaw had only just begun, and the sleighing was capital.

Jerry Buntley had told them more about sugar that day than they had ever heard before. It was a great treat to be invited to a maple-sugaring at old Mr. Wire’s, and Jerry’s country cousins were glad of having something worth while to take with them by way of payment; that is, they were glad to take Jerry.

He was glad to go, and he talked sugar until every soul in the sleigh thought he could taste candy, and Phin found himself comparing the color of his sorrel team to that of the five pounds his mother sent back to Barnes’s grocery store, because, as she said, “she wasn’t going to pay any ‘leven cents a pound for building sand.”

It was not many minutes before they pulled up in front of old Mr. Wire’s big, rambling old

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

farm-house, and there were Jim and Sally Wire coming out to meet them. Old Mrs. Wire was in the doorway, and she looked twenty years younger as soon as they had a look at her husband. Mainly because the difference in their ages was a good deal more than that.

Nobody knew how tall Mr. Wire would have been if he had stood up, but the oldest old ladies around Lender's Mills village all said he'd had that stoop in his shoulders ever since they'd known him.

“My mother used to say,” said Elder Meadows, “that old Wire’s father was a short, stocky man, and built his log-house to fit himself, and so when his son got taller’n he was himself, he had to hold his head down, ‘specially coming through the door.”

There he was now, and the visitors had not been in the house five minutes before Salina Meadows told how much Jerry Buntley knew about sugar.

“His father sells tons of it, and his brother’s a clerk in a sugar store, and his uncle’s a book-keeper in a sugar refinery in the city—”

“Ten stories high!” put in Jerry, with a down look of modesty.

“—and he’s seen sugar plantations, and mo-

IN THE OPEN

lasses factories, and where they make all sorts of candy."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Wire. "I'm glad you fetched him along."

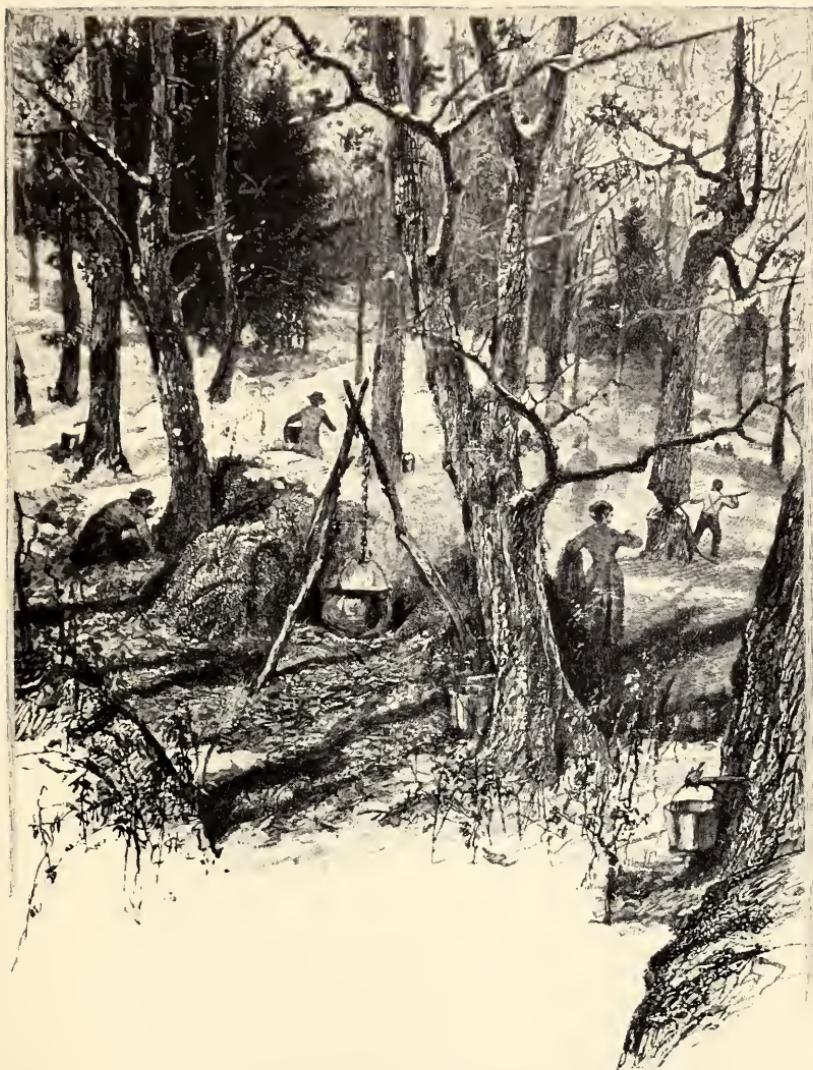
"Wa'al, so'm I," said old Mr. Wire. "No man ain't ever too old to l'arn. I've only been a-b'ilin' sap for a leetle risin' of fifty year, and I don't know much. You're jest in time. The sun's lookin' down warm to-day, and we was jest a-wantin' to set out for the bush."

"It isn't the fur-away bush," said Mrs. Wire; "it's that there patch nighest the house. The trees ain't been tapped this five year, and they'll run the best kind."

"There'll be more here by-and-by," said Sally Wire. "Don't take your things off. We'll have a real good time."

Old Mr. Wire took Jerry Buntley right along with him—under his wing, as you might say. He asked him questions, too, and nobody could guess how many times Jerry made him exclaim, "You don't say!" or, "Do tell, now, is that so?"

The forest had been left standing on all that hill-side for nothing else in the world but sugar. It was not half an hour before the Wires and their visitors were crunching over the crust among the trees, or standing around the great



EVERY FIRE HAD A GREAT IRON KETTLE ON IT

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

fires that had been built and lit before they came. Every fire had a great iron kettle on it, and every kettle was bubbling for dear life, except when a dash of cold sap was ladled into it from the barrel that stood under the nearest tree.

"It's afternoon now," said Sally Wire. "I do hope the other folks 'll get here before it's too dark. But then we can have a good time at the house in the evening."

"Boys," said old Mr. Wire, "if you want to help, you jest take them two auger bits and them spiles, and go and tap a fresh lot of trees over there to the east'ard. Jim and I'll go round with the buckets."

Wonderfully white and clean were all his buckets and shoulder-yokes, and his wooden troughs that caught the sap as it dripped into them from the ends of the wooden spiles he had driven into the trees he had tapped already. There was plenty of work for him and his son, and so Jerry Buntley and Phin Meadows and Rush Potts marched away to the east, while the girls hung around the kettles and tested the syrup in ever way they knew how, to see if any of it had boiled long enough.

"We'll have plenty to sugar off with in the

IN THE OPEN

house this evening," said Sally Wire; "but we mustn't let any of it get burned."

Jerry took possession of an auger and a bundle of spiles, and Phin took the other auger, and Rush Potts said he'd just go along to learn how.

"Catching cold are you, Phineas?" asked Jerry, as he began to work his auger into a splendidly tall tree, and Phin and Rush both were seized with a sudden fit of coughing.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh — no — ugh — I guess not. Bore it deep, Jerry. Old man Wire is particular about that."

"Guess I know how to tap a tree," said Jerry. "The sun shines right on this one, and the sap 'll run well."

"Ugh - ugh - ugh," coughed Rush Potts. "I guess I'll help Phin. He doesn't know as much as you do."

"I should say not," diffidently replied Jerry; but he had finished his first tree quite skilfully, and now he went for his second with all the zeal of a true sportsman.

"Phineas," he shouted, a moment later, "when you come to a maple of this kind, knock off the outer bark! It bores easier."

"All right," replied Phin, with his mouth

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

half full of his handkerchief. But he added, in a lower voice: "Rush, stop rolling in the snow. He's tapping a hickory this time."

"T'other was an elm. Oh, if he isn't fun! What 'll old man Wire say to that?"

"Keep still. Get up, can't you? I can't bore a hole worth a cent. Give me a spile."

Jerry was an enthusiastic sugar-maker, and his rapidity of work was a credit to him.

"Maple this time," said Phin, at the end of Jerry's next job. "But look at what he's doing now."

"Beech! There'll be more sugar 'n old Wire 'll know what to do with."

"We must pitch in, Rush. I want to be on hand when old Wire comes to see if his spiles are set right. Maybe it 'll kill him."

"I've tapped pretty nearly two trees to their one," said Jerry to himself, "but I won't boast of it. Here's a remarkably fine tree, right in the sun. I hope they won't make any mistakes."

With that he started his twist of steel into the yielding wood of one of the noblest silver-birches in all that forest, and in a wonderfully short time there was another spile fitted. Whether there would be any need for Mr. Wire to put

IN THE OPEN

a sap trough under the end of that spile was quite another question.

The crust was thick, and bore very well, so that the girls had no wading to do in going from one fire to another; and Jim Wire and his father worked like beavers at emptying the sap troughs and carrying in the almost colorless, sweetish-tasting liquid their trees had yielded them.

“Now, Jim,” said Mr. Wire, at last, “we’d better take a lot of troughs and follow them fellers. ’Twon’t do to waste any sap.”

Phin and Rush saw them coming, and at once stopped work. So did Jerry Buntley, for he had some suggestions to make about those spiles. It seemed to him that some of them were bored too small for the quantity of sap which was expected to run through them.

He and the others came up just as the gray-headed old sugar-maker stopped in front of Jerry’s first tree, and they got there in time to wink hard at Jim Wire. All three of them stepped around behind Jerry and Mr. Wire.

“You’ve sot that there spile in jest about right, Mr. Buntley,” said Mr. Wire, without changing a muscle of his wrinkled face; “but this kind of maple don’t give any sugar at this

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

season of the year. It isn't a winter maple; it's the kind we call an ellum."

"Ah! Oh yes! Strange I didn't notice."

"Doesn't yield anything but brown sugar—common brown sugar. It's all right, though. I declar'!"

He was looking at the shell-bark hickory now, and that specimen of Jerry's work was a hard pull on his politeness.

"Jim," he said, "put a trough under thar. It's a changin' world. Things isn't what they used to be. Mebbe thar's sugar into hickory nowadays."

"Hickory!" gasped Jerry. "That's a fact. I kind o' didn't look up to see what it was."

"And ye couldn't ha' told by the bark; of course not. I'd say—now—there—well—exactly—nobody ain't never too old to l'arn. Beech, basswood, ellum, black-walnut, birch—if thar'd been a saxafrax, he'd ha' gone and tapped it for root-beer."

There was an explosion behind them just then, for the three other boys gave it up the moment they saw it had been too much for old Mr. Wire.

"Put troughs to all on 'em, Jim," said the latter, solemnly, recovering himself. "Stop

IN THE OPEN

your ignorant, onmannerly laughin'. Mr. Buntley, jest you come back to the kittles, and tell me over ag'in what you was a-sayin' about syrup."

Jerry was beginning to understand the tree joke, but he could not see why Phin Meadows should roll Rush Potts and Jim Wire over in the snow the way he did, for he said to himself:

"It's a mistake any man would make. One tree is just like another. I wonder how Mr. Wire tells them apart? I think I will ask him before we go to the house."

So he did, and the old man answered him with cast-iron politeness that he knew his trees, just as he did his dogs, by their bark.

When the day in the sugar-bush was over, however, and when, after supper, the fun in the house began, with a round dozen more of country boys and girls to keep it up, Jerry heard all sorts of things. The syrup, carried in and boiled down in the kettles over the kitchen fire, was cooled, on the snow, and every other way, into "hickory sugar," "birch candy," "elm taffy," "beech twist," and all sorts of uncommon sweetness, and Jerry overheard Mrs. Wire saying to Hannah Potts:

"You don't say! Did he really tap 'em all?

IN A SUGAR-BUSH

He looks as if he might know suthin', too. Mebbe he was jokin'."

All the rest were, except old Mr. Wire; and when the sorrel span was brought out to take home the sleigh-load that came from Lender's Mills village, he said to Jerry Buntley:

"No man ain't never too old to l'arn, and it wasn't knowin' too much made me stoop-shouldered. Thar's a heap o' sense in what you told me about that new way of settlin' surrup."

Nevertheless, Jim Wire went around the next morning and took away all the troughs from under the trees which had not yielded any sap, and put them where they were likely to do more good.

IX

A RIPPER

And How It Steered Itself

T'S nothing on earth but a pair of bobs. We've rigged that kind of thing lots and lots of times over on our hill. All you need is a couple of sleds and a plank."

"Yes, Rod, and when you've done it they won't steer worth a cent."

"Yes, they do. Dig your heels in."

"Stop your sled just so much every time you dig. A rudder's just as bad. We've tried 'em."

"So've we, Court Hoffman. I guess there wasn't ever anything much started on your hill till after we'd showed you how, over on ours."

"You never showed anybody how to make a ripper like this."

"Ripper? We'll see about that."

There they stood looking at Courtland Hoff-

A RIPPER

man's new coasting-machine. He was the undoubtedly leader of the West Hill coasters, as Rodney Sanderson was of the East Hill boys.

The new ripper was a beauty, and had cost some money. It was, as Rod said, a pair of bobs, with a plank on top to hold them together. There was room on it for half a dozen boys, and more if they packed, and it was handsomely finished. The one thing about it that no boy in Cuzco Centre really believed in, except Court Hoffman, was the steering-gear.

This was a half-wheel, as wide as the sled, mounted on the front bob, on an axle that went down through the plank; and the idea that when you turned that wheel the front bob would turn too, and the ripper be steered by it, was too much for anything. Some of the oldest men in the village had shaken their heads at that sled, and Squire Sanderson himself had remarked to Deacon Rogers: "They didn't spile the boys with any sech nonsense in our day, deacon."

Cuzco Centre had two hills, one on each side, and they were tremendous affairs. The older people believed they were put there so as to have a valley between them for the village to stand in, but the boys knew exactly what they

IN THE OPEN

were really for, especially in winter, and when the coasting was good.

The main street ran through the middle of the valley and the village; but it failed to make a fair division of things, for the river ran a crooked parallel with it a short distance eastward. It was the glory of the East Side boys that the river ran through their ground—fish, swimming-hole, ponds, skating, old bridge, and all; but it cut off the lower end of their long coast from the hill road. No sled in Cuzco had ever reached the bridge, however, so it was just as well; but the West Side boys told wonderful stories of the distances they had buzzed over on the half-mile level at the bottom of their hill. That was what Court Hoffman meant, too, when he said:

“You wouldn’t have room for a ripper on your hill. If you want to see how one works, you’ll have to come over and look on. Give you a ride, too, if you think you wouldn’t be afraid. They go just like lightning.”

Rod Sanderson did not say anything, but he looked up the road toward the East Hill, and the high, white, snow-covered ridge seemed to say:

“Look up here. There is as much of me as

A RIPPER

ever there was. You do your share, and we'll beat 'em."

Court Hoffman made two boys happy by letting them drag his ripper home for him, and Rod Sanderson walked off with an idea in his head.

"There'll be a moon to-night. Never was better coasting. I'll just try it on."

Part of that idea was now lying over in his father's barn-yard, in the shape of an old, weather-beaten, worn-out, double-seated sleigh, with a goose-neck front. It had been a handsome affair in its day, but it had not had any day to speak of since Rodney could remember. It was drifted under now, and it took a good hour to get it out, even with the help of Put Willoughby.

"Going to make a ripper of it?" said Put, doubtfully. "The runners are all right, but the box is on it yet, and the seats."

"We'll put in buffalo robes and blankets, and fix it fine."

"How on earth 'll you steer? There isn't any boy in Cuzco with legs enough to heel it for a sleigh of that size."

"I'll show you. I'm going to rig a boom out astern for a rudder. Steer like a ship."

IN THE OPEN

“You don’t say!”

Put had a good deal to say, however, when he saw Rod cut a hole in the back of that sleigh box, and shove through it a long pole with a spike on the end.

“Steer? Of course it will. I could steer it myself. Only how on earth ’ll we ever get it up to the top of the East Hill?”

There might have been some difficulty about that, if all the boys on that side of the main street had not taken the matter in hand. They were a public-spirited lot, and they were all jealous of Court Hoffman’s town-made, new-fangled, fancy-painted gimcrack. They knew it wouldn’t work, and they said so, and they pulled and pushed at Rod’s wonderful idea that evening until they got it up the hill. Then they all got in, or tried to, and the old ark looked more like a pyramid of boys than anything else.

It was a splendid moon-lit evening, and the West Hill boys were out, every soul of them, and the best friends Court Hoffman had were half afraid he wouldn’t invite them to ride on his ripper the first time. Then they were more than half afraid he would, for they all knew Deacon Rogers had said there was no telling

A RIPPER

where that thing would go to if it once got well agoing.

The valley, and the village, and the river, and the East Hill would be in the way, to be sure, and that was something; but the hill road was as slippery as ice, and the new ripper looked more and more like a shark when Court Hoffman lifted it to show them how bright and smooth the runner irons were.

He showed them also how the wheel worked, and declared that he could steer that ripper all around a house. That was what made Jim Delany ask:

“Could ye stheer it round a wood-sleigh, wid three yoke of oxen, av ye met ‘em in the sthrate yonder?”

“I’ll show you. Now, boys, who’s going with me? Hurrah! The more the merrier!”

“I’m wid ye!” shouted Jim Delany. “It ’ll be bad luck for any horned baste we run into.”

One after another the larger boys followed Jim, and Court never stopped to count.

“Keep your feet on the foot-rests!” he shouted. “Hold on hard! Hold steady as rocks! We’ll be off in a minute! Ready, all? Go, then!”

And go it was, with nearly a mile of sloping

IN THE OPEN

road before them, and beyond that the long, glittering reach of the level.

There was time for a cheer of two, and they gave one, and nearly half of another; but that second cheer seemed to be cut in two by something.

Court Hoffman grasped his wheel-tiller with all the strength he had in him, and looked straight ahead. He had ridden on that sort of machine before, and he knew what was coming the moment she got her speed on.

But the other boys?

Dan Varick's grip on Jim Delany would have brought a yell from him if he had dared to open his mouth. Jim was thinking, too, but he and all the rest were thinking the same thought.

“Fences? They're nothing but two black streaks at the side of the road. Oh dear! we'll go clean through the village. What if we should run into something?”

They held on like good fellows, and made that ripper-load of boys as nearly as possible one solid mass, so that it was easier for Court Hoffman to steer. Even he, though, was beginning to have his doubts as to where they would bring up, and whether he could steer safely around the curve where the road from



COURT HOFFMAN GRASPED HIS WHEEL-TILLER WITH ALL THE
STRENGTH HE HAD

A RIPPER

the West Hill crossed the main street, and met the road from the East that led over the bridge.

The speed was awful! No express train ever went faster, and a race-horse would have been passed as if he were standing still.

Danger in it? Of course there was, and the lives of all of them depended upon the nerve and pluck of Court Hoffman, and the skill he might show in getting around the curve. Yes, and on whether or not there should be a clear road, or a stray team or cow or human being to run against.

It was a terrible risk to run, and all the boys left on the hill were glad they had let somebody else try the first ride on the ripper.

Before the beginning of that swift, perilous dash, however, Rod Sanderson and the East Side boys had completed their preparations. Some of them had to get off and push to get the old sleigh started, and only one of these managed to get on again. Three more jumped off before the "whopper," as Rodney called her, had gone ten rods, and it may have been because they had doubts as to where she would fetch up.

"She just steers lovely," remarked Put Wiloughby, as he noticed how Rod Sanderson was straining at the long handle of his rudder.

IN THE OPEN

“She’s beginning to go faster!”

“She’s a-gaining!”

“Don’t she go it!”

“Hurrah—ah—aw—aw!”

They all joined in that, but at just that moment the old sleigh shoved her goose-necks over the little roll at the edge of the first really steep slope of the East Hill road, and she seemed to give a great jump.

“Rod, where’s your rudder?”

“Gone! I—”

There was no more to be said. It had been jerked from him, through the hole he had cut for it, the moment the bent spike caught in an icy place, and the old sleigh had things in her own hands from that moment.

She seemed to know it, and to be tickled half to death over the notion of doing her own running, without a span of horses in front of her. She was not a ripper, indeed, but she was a “whopper,” and she had weight enough on board to give her all the impetus she needed down that hill.

How she did plunge and slip! and how the loose snow and bits of ice did fly! Still, she had been over that road many a time, and seemed to know it like a book now; that is, the ruts

A RIPPER

were deep, and her runners kept in them as surely as the wheels of a street-car keep in the grooves of the track. Faster and faster, with nobody to steer, and no earthly chance of stopping her! There never was such coasting, nor so many boys doing it on one big sled.

Rod Sanderson looked out ahead over his crouching load, and the wind cut by his face as if there had been a hurricane. A team on the bridge! What if it should come on into the road? What if the old sleigh should take a notion to go on over the bridge and into the village, or anywhere?

“Oh dear! she’s going faster!”

The short stretch of level road at the bottom of the East Hill was reached like a flash, and it was now going by like another flash—a little slower, to be sure, but with no sign of stopping.

The driver of the team on the bridge had halted his oxen, and the boys in the sleigh seemed all at once to feel the same impulse to dodge. They leaned toward the right, and it may be some of them meant to jump; but the pressure helped a clog of wood the runners touched at that moment to turn the “whopper” out of the ruts of the road, and into the well-worn slide that led down the river-bank. It

IN THE OPEN

was her last plunge, and she was nearly out of breath when she took it, but it was well for those boys the ice was so thick. It bore them splendidly, sleigh and all, and away they went, until their ride used itself up, just half-way over. Just as they were all drawing their breath for a grand hurrah, something black and long shot down from the western bank of the river, and out upon the very ice that belonged to them.

“Coming right for us!”

“Boys! boys! that’s Court Hoffman’s ripper!”

Court had done it. He had steered successfully around the curve, partly because some of his speed had gone when he reached it, and his remaining impetus had carried him on until he slipped into the gentle declivity toward the bridge and the river.

“I say,” said Rob Sanderson, as the passengers of the ripper sprang to their feet, “how far did you have to haul that thing after you got downhill?”

“Ran all the way itself.”

“Well, so did our ‘whopper.’ Steered herself, too, and that’s more’n yours can do.”

“Well, yes, I should say so.”

Court was looking and feeling a little thoughtful. The coasting on the West Hill was almost

A RIPPER

too good for his ripper, and he wanted to consider the matter before he tried it again.

As for the "whopper," there was no such thing as persuading the East Hill boys to haul her up the road for another free ride that evening.

X

THROUGH THE BARN

How a New Station was Made

UBE," said Bun Gates, when they "R came together one day after breakfast, "did you hear about Squire Cudworth's new barn?"

"Guess there isn't anything more to hear about it. Folks didn't talk of anything else while he was putting it up. Father said it would hold horses enough to run a livery-stable."

"That isn't it. I heard all about it at breakfast. The railroad's goin' to run right through it."

"Right through the barn? I wish they'd run it through the academy, if 'twasn't for spoiling the green."

"It's cut Pop Simmons's orchard right in two, and they've tore away Widow McCue's

THROUGH THE BARN

pig-pen, spite of all Felix and Biddy could do to stop 'em. Now it's the big barn."

"Biggest barn there ever was anywhere around here. It's just awful. Did you ever see a railroad?"

"Only the streak they've made along where this one's going to come. I'll tell you what father said, though."

"What did he say, Bun?"

"He said it was one of old Squire Cudworth's jokes. There was a quarrel between him and the railroad, and so he put the barn there to keep it from coming through."

"It won't do it, Bun. A railroad 'll go right through a hill and not half try."

"Come on, Rube, we'll be late; but father says he guesses the railroad didn't make anything very heavy out of the squire's joke."

When the class in arithmetic was called up that forenoon, Bun Gates and Rube Hollenhouser went down to the foot of it, one after the other, for the first time that academy term. When they got there and could have a good look at each other's slates, they each knew what sort of a picture the other could make of Squire Cudworth's big barn, with something full of

IN THE OPEN

fire and smoke and steam smashing into it at both ends.

The afternoon wore away, a little at a time, until it was all gone, but every boy they knew had heard of what was coming to Squire Cudworth's barn by that time, and at least a dozen of them wanted to go and have a look at it.

Squire Cudworth was standing at the corner of the barn, a very large, fat, rosy-faced man, with his hands in his pockets, and he looked as if he were waiting for something. He chuckled all over, and they could hear him jingle the money in his pockets as he recognized the boys.

"That's the railroad, boys. Them's the ties, and some call 'em sleepers. The rails are glued down on 'em. You'll see some men come along pretty soon with great bundles of iron rails in one hand and pots of glue in the other. They're 'most here now. By to-morrer night that barn of mine won't be a safe place for hosses. It's awful, boys—jest awful!"

"How do you s'pose they'll get through the barn?" asked Bun.

"Can't say. I've kep' 'em off long as I could. That's what I'm here for now. We don't need any railroad in Prome Centre. That's what I

THROUGH THE BARN

told 'em. If they'd only dig the creek out good and deep, so it would be of some use. They wouldn't, though, and I might as well have built my barn right in the middle of the creek."

Every boy in the crowd was listening to him, but not one of them could see what there was in it all that made the old squire chuckle so. Three or four asked:

"Does it go through on Friday?"

"Day after to-morrer, boys. I shall be out of breath by that time. Have to go home and go to bed, and put all my hosses in the old barn up on the hill. You'd all better be here then. Tell all the other boys. Have 'em all come." Chuckle, chuckle, chuckle, and the bunches of keys and the small change jingled merrily, as if the squire were making fun of the railroad, or the boys, or of his misfortunes.

"We'll all be here," said Rube. "Boys, there'll be something worth seeing, sure's you live."

They were most of them at one place or another along the track before school next morning, and at the noon recess they compared notes of the matters they had seen—men spiking down rails with big hammers, for instance, instead of glue-pots. It was a great time for a lot of boys

IN THE OPEN

who had never seen anything of the kind before, and Rube Hollenhouser stirred up their envy a little. He said:

“Dolf Zimmerman’s been on a railroad. He told me all about it. There was an accident, too, and he’d have been killed as dead as a hammer if he’d been there.”

“Dolf Zimmerman!” exclaimed a fellow who lived away at the upper end of the village. “Who cares for him? He’s travelled, that’s all. This railroad of ours is going to run right through Cudworth’s barn. I guess he wouldn’t want to be riding on it just then.”

There was a general agreement with that opinion, but the boys who lived at places below Zimmerman’s store all found an errand in there before the day was over. Some of them only bought a cent’s worth of something, and looked at Dolf, but three or four asked him questions right out, and it was Felix McCue who got the most out of him. The Widow McCue never traded at Zimmerman’s, and it was a bold thing for Felix to walk in and ask Dolf over the counter:

“What’s the price of yer bist Jayvy coffee?”

“Thirty-five cents a pound.”

“That’s what I wanted to know. Do yiz

THROUGH THE BARN

think it 'll be any chaper after the railroad gits through the bar-r-n?"

"Oh, you get eout! You don't want any coffee."

"Don't I, thin? I don't belave ye know any more about a railroad than I do meself. Come on, b'yes. He's been humbuggin' ye."

Rube Hollenhouser afterward stood up manfully for Dolf Zimmerman's reputation as a traveller, and all the cows in Prome Centre went to their pastures very early the next morning. That was Friday, and it was to be the last day of the mortal life of Squire Cudworth's big barn, and there were a good many older people, as well as very young ones, who were willing to hurry through their breakfasts, and walk over to see what the squire was going to do about it. Everybody knew more or less about the quarrel between him and the railway company, and there was not a doubt in the minds of his fellow-citizens but what he had beaten the corporation in every point but the one of keeping his barn.

There he was, when Rube and Bun and little Jeff Gates, and a crowd of other boys and their brothers and sisters, and some of their fathers and mothers and aunts and uncles, began to swarm around and look at him. There was the

IN THE OPEN

squire, indeed, and his face was redder than ever, and Bun Gates remarked:

“I say, Rube, how he does jingle!”

“Yes, but haven’t they made that railroad jingle? They’ve nailed down the rails ’most up to the stable-door on each side: If an engine should come now, it could run its nose against the barn.”

“They’ve got to do it, Rube. They’ve got to smash it right through.”

“I say, Bun, the stable’s full of men. They’re working at something. Hear ’em hammer?”

“There’s another lot around outside. See’em?”

“Hear ’em in the barn! Wonder ’f they’d let us in?”

“Guess not. I don’t want to go in, neither. Hey! What’s that?”

Every face in the gathering crowd was suddenly turned toward the north, as if one pull had fetched them all around at the same instant. Not that they saw anything, but that the deafest man among them could hear the whistle of the coming locomotive. It would be the first of its kind ever seen in Prome Centre, and now it was gathering itself, they all knew, for a rush down that track at Squire Cudworth’s barn.

THROUGH THE BARN

More boys were coming, and they all asked questions the moment they could get their breaths after they reached the crowd and had one look at the barn. It was there yet, and so was the squire, but there had been another awful whistle up north, beyond Pop Simmons's orchard.

"Rube," said Bun, "those fellows are just a-jerking that stable out of its boots. They're h'isting the roof off now."

"Hear 'em hammering inside? There's something going on. Don't they just swarm, though, and can't they work?"

It was a simple fact that the railway company had sent a good many men to take care of the last obstacle in its way, and Squire Cudworth's joke lasted to the very end. He began to grow redder and redder in the face. Then he jingled more than ever for a minute, and then he stopped jingling altogether, for just then it seemed as if the whole side of the stable was stripped off at a push or two. The roof was already off. One minute more and the ends were gone, doors and all, and a well-dressed, gentlemanly person stepped out along the track.

"Boys!" shouted Rube. "There's the railroad now, inside the stable."

IN THE OPEN

“If they haven’t put down a track right where the floor was!” said Bun.

There sounded another tremendous shriek from beyond the orchard, and a cloud of smoke and steam began to move along over the tree-tops.

“Here she comes, boys!”

“She’s a-coming! She’s a-coming!”

“Hark, Rube,” said Bun. “What’s that man saying to Squire Cudworth?”

They heard him, and he said it very politely.

“Quick work, eh, Mr. Cudworth?”

“Sharp. Far as you’ve gone. Think you’ll get the whole of it off to-day?”

“Off? Oh no. Don’t you see? We’re making a station-house out of the main barn. Just the thing. Set it up a little higher; that’s all. Quite a saving of money to the company.”

“Bun,” said Rube, “did you ever see old Squire Cudworth look so angry as he does now? Guess they must have got the joke on him somehow.”

“It ’ll make him sick if they have.”

“Hey! She’s ’most got here!”

They were all holding their breaths for the next minute or so, for there was the first locomotive they had ever seen outside of a picture,

THROUGH THE BARN

and it was whistling and coughing and ringing its bell and backing and starting and doing everything but dance, right through where Squire Cudworth's stable had been.

“Rube, they're not going to pull down any more of the barn.”

“Tell you what, though, they never 'd have got through the way they did if they hadn't laid some track inside and knocked the doors down.”

“Course they wouldn't. I say, old Squire Cudworth's going home.”

“Hear the 'cademy bell! Did you know it was nine o'clock? What 'll we say to Miss Eccles?”

“I don't care so much, Rube. She won't get a roomful till this crowd gets there. There's about as many girls as boys.”

“Black marks all 'round. She's seen a railroad before, or she'd have been here herself. I ain't so sorry as I was about that barn. Do you know what's a station-house?”

“I guess I do, but we'd better stop after school and ask Dolf Zimmerman.”

At the supper-table that evening, Bun Gates heard his father say to his mother: “Squire Cudworth? Oh yes, he got a good price for his

IN THE OPEN

barn. What made him sick was the railway superintendent thanking him for building them so nice a station-house, just where they wanted it. He tried to laugh, but he couldn't, and everybody else did."

XI

THE UNLUCKY SETTLERS

An Adventure with “Ungrateful Insects”

EDWARD EACON WHITNEY'S drug store fronted on the green, and Steve had just come out, and his father was standing in the door.

Just then Andy Yokum called out across the street: “Steve! Steve Whitney! What are we boys going to do with this here Saturday, now we've lost our ball?”

“I know what I'd like to do. Come over here.”

“What is it, Steve?”

“Well, you see, Andy, I was down to old Captain Hollowboy's after school yesterday with a lot of all sorts of chemicals and things he'd been buying, and I knocked and I knocked, and I couldn't get in; so I went around to the back door, and there was Captain Hollowboy

IN THE OPEN

looking up at the biggest hornets' nest you ever saw."

"Hornets' nest? Wasn't he trying to break 'em up?"

"No, sir! He was just looking at 'em. And he told me he'd been watching that nest ever since the hornets began on it."

"Haven't they stung him yet?"

"Well, no; he said they hadn't. He's an old bachelor, you know, and he said hornets were good enough neighbors as long as there weren't any small boys around."

"Couldn't we get him to let us go in on that nest?"

"That's just what I asked him, and he said—"

"Hold up, Steve—here he comes!"

"Good-morning, Captain Hollowboy. Toothache, eh? I'll get you something."

"Toothache, deacon! No, it isn't toothache. Is this the drug store? Have I got here? Can't but just see."

"Steve," shouted Andy, "just look at his face! It's all mud."

Captain Hollowboy had taken away his great red bandana handkerchief to look around him, and Deacon Whitney was holding up both his hands.

THE UNLUCKY SETTLERS

“What is the matter, captain?”

“Hornets, deacon—hornets; the most pernicious and ungrateful of all insects. I have applied aqueously saturated alluvium, but I want some ammonia.”

“Slapped on some mud first, and now you want to try some hartshorn? That’s right. I’ll get you some quick.”

He was getting behind the counter very fast for so fat a man, but Steve shouted: “Hurrah, Andy! let’s go for the captain’s nest.”

“Do, my dear boys, do. I consent to their utter obliteration and extermination; but I wish you would preserve their interesting domicile intact.”

“He means, Andy, that we may kill the hornets, but we mustn’t spoil the nest. He’s awful on big words.”

“How did it happen?” asked the deacon, as he held out a big bottle and a sponge.

“Happen? It was no fault of mine. I did but attempt an unobtrusive inspection of the marvellous ramifications of their intricate habitation.”

“That’s it,” said Steve. “He stuck his nose into the nest, and they all went for him. Come on, Andy.”

IN THE OPEN

They were out of sight by the time half the mud had been sponged from the captain's long, lean face, but before they reached his queer little house, at the farther corner of the village green, the hornets were in trouble.

Harman Strauss and Bill Ogden and Van Seaver had seen the captain run, and they all knew about that hornets' nest.

"Fire's the thing," said Van.

"Biggest smoke we can make," said Harm Strauss.

"We must wrap our heads up," said Bill Ogden, "but it 'll be the biggest kind of a Saturday."

Van had some matches in his pocket, and the heap of sticks and straw and chips the boys gathered for him was a foot high by the time he got the third match well agoing.

The hornets' nest was a big one, and there was a wonderfully numerous tribe of winged settlers in it. They had picked out a fine, airy place to hang their house—just under the eaves of the open shed, back of Captain Hollowboy's one-story kitchen, at the corner.

The right place for the fire was at the foot of the upright corner post, but Harman Strauss told Van: "If we stick it there, Van, we'll set the house afire."

THE UNLUCKY SETTLERS

"That'd never do," said Bill Seaver. "It's jam-full of all sorts of chemicals and things. There'd be an awful blow-up if that house got afire."

"Might spoil the village."

"Oh, but wouldn't it blow those hornets good and high!"

Just at that moment Steve Whitney and Andy Yokum came over the fence. They did not even wait to put their handkerchiefs around their necks and faces before they began to gather great bunches of weeds.

It was time every boy of them had some kind of a brush in his hand, for the angry insects had smelled the smoke, and were coming out to see about it.

Such a fire department as they turned themselves into! Or, rather, they set out as a kind of police brigade to fight a crowd of young incendiaries, and save Captain Hollowboy's house from being set on fire and burned up. They were at least determined that not one of those boys should get any nearer the house they had so carefully built for themselves against the eaves.

"Mud! mud!" shouted Steve, in half a minute. "Boys, where does the captain keep his mud?"

IN THE OPEN

“Have they stung you?”

“Oh, my nose!”

Steve had just started to run for some mud, when he gave another shrill whoop, “Yow! he’s in my neck!” and there was no such thing as any other boy helping him, for each one of them was thrashing away at the nearest hornet—that is, except Van; for he had been after some more sticks, and was just putting them on the fire when he felt as if some one had dropped a live coal right on his left ankle.

“Wah!” yelled Van, “I’ve burned a hole in one of my stockings. Ow! it’s burned another! Oh, boys, it’s two hornets lit right side by side. Oh dear!” And there he was, rolling over in the grass, and striking with a bunch of weeds at something he saw in the air above him.

Harman Strauss had been the wisest of them all, for he had pulled a couple of damp towels off the clothes-line, and had wrapped his head in one and given the other to Bill Ogden.

Now he had found Captain Hollowboy’s garden rake, and was shouting: “Give it to ‘em, boys! You kill the hornets, and I’ll pull down the nest. We must keep it for the captain.”

“He wants it for a specimen,” explained Steve Whitney.

THE UNLUCKY SETTLERS

“Will he pickle it somehow?” asked Andy. But at that moment it seemed to him as if he had leaned against a red-hot pin, and he clapped his hand to his side. He had better not have dropped his bunch of weeds just then, for in a second more he was calling out: “Van! Van! did you say you knew where the mud was?”

“Here it is, Andy, right by the cistern. The captain must have stirred it up for himself.”

“And they kept right on stinging him while he was putting it on.”

“Yah! That’s just what they’re doing now. They can sting right through a shirt-sleeve.”

“Sting? I guess they can; right through anything. Oh dear! I’ve got another! Boys, we won’t leave one of ‘em!”

“Boys! boys!—I say, boys!—what are you doing? I never indicated my assent to the application of fire!”

“I declare!” exclaimed Deacon Whitney, as he came through the gate behind Captain Hollowboy, “the young rascals have set them all agoing.”

“Can you see, deacon? I cannot, with any accuracy. Where have they located the combustion?”

“Stuck their bonfire right under the nest,

IN THE OPEN

captain. Let 'em alone. The upright's burnin' a leetle, but you can put it out easy."

As he said that, Harm Strauss made a valiant pull with his rake, and down came the nest right into the bonfire.

"There!" exclaimed Steve, "you've spoiled it!"

"Such an exceptionally well-developed specimen!" groaned the captain. "Pull it out, one of you!"

"Oh! oh!" roared the deacon, clapping both hands on his ample stomach, and doing his best to lean over, "I hope he has pulled it out! It must have gone in half an inch!"

The fire had rapidly blazed high and hot, for straw and splinters and chips kindle fast; and there were no hornets in that nest now, nor any nest left to hold hornets; in fact, for that matter, Captain Hollowboy's yard and garden, and the road in front, were too small to hold what was left of them, and any men and boys at the same time.

Old Mrs. Jones, who lived next door, put her head out of her window to see what was going on, and then that window came down with a great slam; and the next thing seen of Mrs. Jones, her silver spectacles were dropping off into the water-pail as she stooped over it.

THE UNLUCKY SETTLERS

There was no doubt but what that settlement of hornets was thoroughly broken up; but Captain Hollowboy led the way back to the drug store, and they were all ready to go with him.

“I am sorry,” he said to the deacon, “that you or any of my young friends are suffering physical inconvenience from the atrocious assaults of those pernicious insects, but I regret the obliteration of so remarkable a specimen of their ingenuity.”

XII

SETTING THE BROOK AT WORK

What a Water-wheel Did

THE brook had never done a stroke of work in its life. So long, at least, as Mart Benson could remember, it had gurgled across the foot of his father's garden, tumbling heels over head down the little fall in the middle, as if it knew it had got into some place that didn't belong to it, and was in a desperate hurry to get out.

Then it made a dive under the fence, into Squire Spencer's orchard, and then under another fence, and through a low stone archway across the river road.

That was the end of the brook, for the river let it right in without so much as saying: "How do you do?"

"It isn't more'n two feet across anywhere," said Mart to himself. "It isn't so much as that

SETTING THE BROOK AT WORK

just above the fall, and it's a foot and a half below the top of the bank. I could make a dam there, and a flume."

Mart was a great whittler.

Mr. Jellicombe, the carpenter, used to say of him that when he wasn't whittling, it was because he had had to stop to sharpen his knife.

"Well," said Mart, in reply to that, "what's the fun of whittling with a dull knife? If you want a knife to cut straight and smooth, you've got to have an edge on it."

So there was always a pretty good edge on his, and it was curious what things he managed to carve out with it.

He had made a wooden chain out of a long, square stick that Mr. Jellicombe brought to the house to mend a door-frame with. He had made kites, walking-sticks, bats, wooden spoons and forks, a little wagon, and any number of other things, of which about all that could be said was that they gave him plenty of good whittling.

But Mart had been to the mill the day before, and had waited there two hours while his father was having a grist of corn ground. All those two hours had been spent by Mart with a shingle in one hand and his knife in the other, but at

IN THE OPEN

the end of them there was hardly a notch in the shingle, and Mart shut up his knife and put it back in his pocket.

He had been watching the great water-wheel and the flume that brought the water to it from the pond. He had studied the dam, too, and had been thinking of the brook in his father's garden.

The more he looked at it now, the clearer he saw that it was high time for that brook to be doing something.

It was easy enough to gather flat stones and pile them in at the narrow place at the top of the fall. That was little more than a foot high, to be sure, but the dam would more than double it.

Then he begged a couple of old raisin boxes at the store where his father traded, and when the ends were knocked out of them, and they were firmly set in the top of the little dam, one behind the other, they made a good enough flume. The end of the foremost one stuck out beyond the stones, and the water came pouring from it beautifully.

It took all the rest of that day for Mart to get the brook penned in and compelled to run through the raisin boxes, for he had to keep on

SETTING THE BROOK AT WORK

putting stones and sods and dirt behind the dam to strengthen it, as the water rose higher and higher. It would not do to make a pond of the garden, but so long as the brook did not overflow its banks it would do no harm. Sometimes it had run over in the spring, or after very heavy rain-storms.

The very next day Mart hardly went near his new dam, and he was a very serious and busy boy indeed, considering that he was only thirteen.

A piece of wood had to be found first two and a half inches square and about a foot and a half long. It took a great deal of work to shave down the four corners of that piece of wood till it had eight smooth sides all just alike. Then Mart was compelled to go over to Jellicombe's carpenter-shop and put his piece of wood in a vise, so it would he held steady, while he took a saw and sawed a long groove, more than half an inch deep, in the middle of each one of those eight faces. Jellicombe told him he had done that job very well.

"Looks like a hub for something. Going to make a wheel this time?"

"I'll show you. May I take your inch auger and bore a hole in each end?"

IN THE OPEN

“Go ahead. If you ain’t kerful, you’ll split yer timber.”

Mart was careful then, but he had trouble before him. He had picked out a number of very straight shingles, and he was whittling away on these now as if he was being paid for it. He cut them down to six inches long, and shaved them at the sides, so that two pieces laid together were just a foot wide. With a little more whittling after that he fitted them all, one by one, into the eight grooves in his “hub,” and his “water-wheel” was done. A proud boy was Mart, but he ought to have kept on being “careful.”

“Look out!” said Mr. Jellicombe, as Mart rapped hard on one of the shingle pieces, to drive it in more firmly. But it was too late.

“Crack!” The hub was split from end to end.

“Got to go to work and make a new one,” said Mart, ruefully.

“Guess I wouldn’t. Just take a couple of two-inch screws, and screw that together again. It ’ll be stronger’n it was before.”

That was a capital idea, and it only took a few minutes to carry it into effect.

“Make your end pins of hard-wood,” said Mr.

SETTING THE BROOK AT WORK

Jellicombe; "and shave 'em smooth. Then they'll run easy."

That was easy enough, but one of those "end pins" was made of an old broom - handle, and was more than a foot long.

"I see what you're up to," said the carpenter, with a grin. "You've made a right down good job of it, too. Grease your journals before you let 'em get wet."

Mart's "journals" for his end pins to run in were two holes he bored in a couple of boards. When these were stuck up on each side of the lower end of his flume, and the water-wheel was set in its place, Mart took off his hat and shouted:

"Hurrah! the brook's at work!"

So it was; for it was rushing fiercely through the two old raisin boxes, and down upon the wide "paddles" of Mart's wheel, and this was spinning around at a tremendous rate.

"You've done it!"

"Is that you, Mr. Jellicombe? I didn't know you'd come."

"You've done it! Now what?"

"Why, I'm going to put another wheel on this long end pin, and set another one above it, and put a strap over both of them."

IN THE OPEN

“Oh, that’s it. Going to make a pulley and band. All right. It ’ll run. There’s plenty of water-power. But what then? Going to build a mill?”

“Guess not. All I care for is, I’ve set the brook to work.”

“Why don’t you make it do something, then, now you’ve found out how?”

“Don’t know of anything small enough for a brook like that.”

“I’ll tell you, then. There’s your mother’s big churn, that goes with a crank. You whittle out a wheel twice as large as that, and set it a little stronger, and raise your dam a few inches, and you can run that churn.”

“Hurrah! I’ll do it!”

There was a good deal of busy whittling before Mart finished that second job, but before two weeks were over there was butter on Mrs. Benson’s dinner-table which had actually been churned by the brook at the bottom of the garden.

XIII

FOREIGN PARTS

And the Adventures of a Mule

THE big south room in the “wing” of Prome Centre Academy always had more boys and girls in it than any other room in the building. Some of the others had boys in them, and some had girls; but this was what old Squire Cudworth called “the mixed-pickles room.” Miss Eccles had made a quiet place of it ever since the first time she rapped on the table with her ruler; but there had never before, during any five minutes, been so little breathing done in that room as there was at the close of school on the first Friday in May.

It took Miss Eccles just five minutes to tell the scholars that to-morrow would be Saturday, and that the new railroad had offered to take the whole academy, except the building and

IN THE OPEN

the desks and benches, on a free excursion to the city, thirty miles north of Prome Centre. All were to be at the railway station at nine o'clock in the morning, and bring their lunches with them; and every five children could bring a grown-up person to take care of them; and they would have three hours in the city to see the sights, and they would all get home safe if nothing happened.

Such long breaths as they all drew when she finished her speech! And half the girls waited, after school, to ask questions; but not one boy had a thing to ask till they got out on the green. Then every fellow turned to the nearest other fellow and said, pretty nearly what Bun Gates said to Rube Hollenhouser:

“Isn’t it great, though?”

“Guess it is,” replied Rube—“only it can’t be done.”

“I’d like to know why it can’t.”

“Cause there’s two hundred and fifty that go to the academy, and all the fellows that have brothers and sisters ’ll bring them; and the fellows that don’t go to the academy they’ll all come; and there’ll be all the grown-up people. Do you s’pose any one railroad can carry such a crowd as that?”

FOREIGN PARTS

“I don’t care, anyhow. Guess we’ll be there in time. A fellow can see a good deal in a city in three hours.”

“It isn’t the biggest kind of a city.”

“It’s bigger than Prome Centre.”

There could be no dispute as to that, but when the excursion train coughed and whistled up to the platform at the railway station the next morning, there was a large amount of vexation because Rube’s prophecy had been looked out for.

There was Miss Eccles at the door, and all the other teachers had been standing by her ever since a little after eight o’clock, and they had been mean enough to point out to the man who gave the tickets around just which ones really went to the academy. They even shut out three boys and a girl who went there last year, and six of all sorts who said they meant to begin to come in the fall.

It was easy enough to arrange about the older people, for the railway man said there weren’t half enough of them to keep such a crowd out of mischief, and old Squire Cudworth and Dolf Zimmerman actually bought and paid for tickets for themselves.

The railroad was very popular that morning

IN THE OPEN

with all the boys and girls who managed to get through the station-house and into a car, but there was a bitter feeling against it left behind among some of the most active young people in or about Prome Centre.

“Bun,” exclaimed Rube, at fifteen minutes past nine, “did you hear that thing whistle? She’s agoing.”

“Hold on tight, Rube. She’ll jerk when she starts.”

“No, she won’t. See there, now! She goes off just as easy!”

It was wonderful the ease with which that locomotive walked away up the track, with all those cars behind her, and every car packed full of happiness and a little anxiety. The railway had only reached Prome a few weeks before that, and it was hardly in good running order now, and Squire Cudworth declared:

“This ’ere’s a mighty risky business, but I s’pose they must do something for poppleairity and to keep people from stage-riding and going afoot. I ain’t in any hurry to-day, and I thought I wouldn’t walk this time.”

Squire Cudworth made a good deal of fun for the young folks in his car, but the academy boys and girls were more in awe than ever of

FOREIGN PARTS

Miss Eccles. That daring woman went from end to end of that train while it was in motion. She ventured right on from car to car until she had told them all to sit still and not put their heads out of the windows and have them knocked off.

“Hear that, Rube?” said Bun Gates.

“Guess I did. They wouldn’t stop this train, the way it’s agoing now, just to run back and pick up a fellow’s hat for him.”

It was grand fun, though, to look out of the windows and see the trees and houses and fences go by so fast. Bun Gates just had time to point once and say:

“See that cow?—she’s just like old Chittenden’s new brindle,” when Rube was justified in replying:

“Cow!—that’s a flock of sheep.”

“They’re gone, too, now. Isn’t this a great way of travelling? It’s awful, though. If you run off the track, there’s no telling where you’ll go to.”

“There wouldn’t be anything left of Prome Centre Academy.”

“I don’t believe it would kill Miss Eccles. She knows all about railroads.”

The very excitement and novelty of it kept them all reasonably still, and the conductor

IN THE OPEN

said he was proud of them, and so was Miss Eccles; but the other teachers did not make any remarks. The academy principal was in the very front car, with his wife and his mother-in-law, and six of his own children and two of their aunts, and about half of the Board of Trustees; everybody knew that he had all he could attend to, and so they did not expect any more of him.

“Rube,” said Bill Chittenden, just a little before they reached the city, “ain’t you tired? I’ve been trying not to sit down heavy till I can’t stand it much longer.”

“Have yez, thin?” interrupted Felix McCue. “Wud the railroad be throubled if wan more fly lit on it somewhere? Ye’ll have to ate more’n ye do now before the weight of ye’ll count wid a railroad.”

Bill Chittenden was about the thinnest boy that lived at his end of the village of Prome Centre, but it was cruel of Felix McCue to tell him so in that way. Before he had time to say anything about Felix’s fight with the railroad men when they tore down his mother’s pig-pen the locomotive whistled to let the city know the train had come, and the whole academy knew at once where it was.

FOREIGN PARTS

"Bun," said Rube, "we've got three hours. Where are you going, first thing?"

"Going to see the canal. Father told me to. It's right in the middle of the city, and maybe they'll take it away now they're making so many railroads. Mother says I rode on it once with her when I was a little chap, but I don't remember a word of it."

Rube agreed that the canal must be worth seeing, but insisted that he had seen it before, and would know when they came to it. Felix McCue saw them slipping away from the crowd, and he darted after them as a matter of course.

"That's it, b'ys. There's more fun wid three than there is wid three hundred. I'm wid ye."

Felix was a good fellow to have along, and they were a full square down the street before the academy "procession" could be formed at the city railway station. There was another railroad that ran through the city from east to west, and there might be a dozen for all the boys knew, but they could plainly perceive that the street they were following led right on toward where the houses seemed to be tallest and thickest. The farther they went, the more people they met, and Felix McCue remarked: "If

IN THE OPEN

they'd lock arms and walk slow, there'd be a procession of 'em."

"That's what our academy's doing now," said Rube. "They won't see half what we will."

"Boys," exclaimed Bun, "there's a bridge straight ahead. That's where the canal is."

They walked a little faster for a couple of minutes, and there it was, right before them. It was wide enough for three canals, and all the way between two high-arched bridges, but when it came to either of these it narrowed to the width of a common road.

"That's what father called the basin," said Bun. "Look at the boats!"

There were several of them, long, heavy-sided affairs, and no two were alike. There were three at the bank, as if they were unloading, or loading, or taking a rest, but all the others were in motion.

"Takes two horses to pull 'em," said Bun. "Look over yonder."

"That boat's only got one horse."

"Luk at the nixt wan," said Felix. "Thim's mules. Oh, but the ears of thim's worth seeing!"

There were not many mules in use near Prome Centre, and this was an especially interesting

FOREIGN PARTS

pair. The one in front, on the tow-path of the canal, was, as Bun said of him, "very small for his ears," and the mule behind was described by Felix McCue as "the biggest mule that iver had ears put onto him."

He was large, indeed, but his goodness was not in proportion to his size, for at that very moment he was preparing to make a disturbance. His driver had rashly halted him, for some reason, and there was no telling when he would make up his mind to go on again.

"Rube," said Bun, "he's backing."

"It's the way of thim," said Felix. "It's the ownly way yiz can get worruk out of some of thim. Put thim wid their heads to the waggin and they'll back wid yez all day."

However that might be, the big mule was backing now, and there was a tremendous hub-bub on the tow-path and on that boat and on another boat a little behind, and a great many people seemed to find the matter worth looking at.

"Bun, he's pointed wrong," shouted Rube. "If he backs three feet more in that direction—"

"He's pulling the little mule right along with him," said Bun.

IN THE OPEN

"He'd pull the canal," said Felix. "There he goes!"

A great shout along the tow-path greeted the perverse success of the big mule, for he not only backed into the canal on his own account, but he drew after him his unlucky companion.

"It's the big splash they made!" exclaimed Felix. "But they can both swim, and they're not backin' now."

The sudden plunge into cold water may have cooled the big mule's temper, but it seemed as if everybody else's temper was lost entirely, and the boat also lost her steerageway and began to yaw around. Just at that moment a still bigger boat was coming through under the bridge, and the man who was steering it looked at the mules in the water instead of minding his business.

It was all the fault of the big mule, of course, but Felix hardly had time to say,

"B'ys, luk at them!" when the two boats came together with a great thump, and you could hear the crash of something breaking.

"Boys," exclaimed Bun, "I wouldn't have missed it for anything! Would you? Hear that fellow!"

They could hear the man on the deck of the

FOREIGN PARTS

mules' own boat shout to the man on the other deck:

“You've done it now!”

“Guess you're stove in.”

“Stove? Guess so. We'll be on the bottom in five minutes.”

“Hear that?” said Rube. “Isn't he a brave fellow, though? Not a bit scared, and his boat's a-sinking under him. I've read of sailors going down with their ship, but I never saw it done before.”

“Where's the rest of the crew?” said Bun. “Guess they haven't any passengers to speak of.”

They heard the man on deck say just then, in answer to a question:

“Cargo of salt in barr'ls. Wish they'd salted down them mules 'fore ever they hitched 'em on to haul for me.”

It was very bad for the salt, and for the mules, and for that boat, and for the canal.

Down she went, lower and lower, faster and faster, until just as the boys drew a long breath, and Bun whispered, loudly, “Six inches more, and she's under,” the boat stopped sinking, and the man on deck shouted:

“Touched bottom! Here we are! Now you just get by us if you can!”

IN THE OPEN

"That's the throuble," said Felix. "D'ye see what it's done, b'ys? It's corked up the canal jist at the mouth of the bridge. Niver another boat'll git by till they pull out this wan."

"They're pulling the mules out down yonder," said Rube. "Come on, boys. We must see something more before we get home."

Whatever else they saw had to be seen quickly, but they were on hand at the railway station when the regular academy procession marched up the street.

Of course they had to give an account of themselves, but Miss Eccles was in excellent spirits for some reason, and she actually responded to their first somewhat misty reply with, "Well, and what did you see that the rest of us did not?"

"Is it what did we see?" exclaimed Felix. "Sure an' we saw a mule commit suicide an' pull another mule into it afther him, an' there was a shipwreck on top o' that, an' the canal's turned into salt-wather."

It took Rube Hollenhouser and Bun Gates all the rest of the time before the train started to make that explanation clear to Miss Eccles and old Squire Cudworth, but all three of the boys had enough to talk about after they got home that evening.

XIV

UP THE CREEK

The Fishing Trip of the "Ark"

T'S a mighty good thing for us,
"I Mort Hopkins, we took such an
early start."

"Oh, Quill, what do we want of
those rollers?"

"You'll find out 'fore we get the *Ark* around
the dam."

"That's so. All ready? Shove her, now.
Here we go. Don't she travel!"

"Mort, what was that long word you went to
the foot on yesterday?"

"Me-an-der-ing."

"And you called it 'mean-drying,' and spelled
it wrong. Tell you what, we're just going to
meandrew now 'fore we get back."

"Taponican Creek 'll give us all the twists
we want. It's as crooked as a ram's horn."

IN THE OPEN

“‘Tisn’t much wider, some places; but the *Ark* will squeeze through ‘most anywhere.”

It would not, indeed, have required much of a flood to float a skiff of that size; but she was a pretty one, and it was no work at all for two stout boys of from twelve to thirteen years of age to “pole her along.” There was not enough water where they now were to encourage the use of oars, but a pair of them lay in the stern, beside the fishing-poles and the bait and luncheon.

The day was one of those truly wonderful Saturdays that come to country boys in summer, and Mort Hopkins and Quill Sanders had all but slighted their breakfasts to get the early start they were now so pleased with.

“Mort, if Taponican Creek runs out of Pawg Lake, we’ll find the place where it does.”

“Guess we will. It’s there, somewhere.”

“We won’t stop to fish along.”

“No, sir! Not one of the boys knows where we’re going.”

“If they’d ha’ known, they’d all have come, and chuck’d the *Ark* jam-full.”

Mere passengers were not wanted on board of a ship that was clearly bound on a voyage of discovery. Extra cargo of any kind would have been bad for the fortunes of such a vessel.

UP THE CREEK

The boys did not pole their boat up-stream for more than twenty minutes before they came to a place where the banks gave the Taponican room to spread itself. Of course, the wider it spread what water it had the thinner the water became.

Right in the middle of a sparkling field of gurgling ripples the *Ark* ran suddenly aground.

“Overboard, Quill!” shouted Mort. “Guess Columbus had to wade before he found much.”

“Noah didn’t.”

“His ark had a roof on it.”

“Shove her, now. There she goes!”

Their trousers were rolled up about as high as they would go, and the water was not very cold. The *Ark* drew less when its entire crew was out of it.

“Ah! Ugh! Crab.”

“Nipped you, did he? Oh, phew! what a clam shell! Stepped right down on it. Catch your crab?”

“He let go. Can’t see him. Didn’t he give my heel a dig, though! They’re the ugliest, sassiest—”

“Jump in. She’ll float now.”

“Shove, or she’ll go back, and get aground again.”

IN THE OPEN

“There’s the dam. Now we’ve got a job on hand.”

The dam was not a high one, but no two boys of their size could have lifted the *Ark* over it. Quill Sanders had thought of that, and the little craft was pulled ashore at a spot where farmers coming to the mill drove down to water their horses.

“There’s just a good road all around from here to the pond. Now for the rollers, Mort.”

Two bits of round poles, about three inches thick and four feet long, were a great help in getting the *Ark* up the slope, but it was slow work for all that. No man in Corry Centre could have hired any two small boys to undertake it. Quill and Mort did it all the more eagerly because no living being would have given them a cent for doing it.

The miller came out, indeed, to shout after them:

“Hullo, boys, what ‘re ye up to?”

“Going to Pawg Lake,” said Quill, proudly. “Your old dam’s in the way, and we’re a-dodg-in’ ‘round it.”

“Pawg Lake! I declare! Do ye spect to ever git back ag’in?”

UP THE CREEK

“Guess we do,” said Mort. “Bring you anything when we come?”

“Ye-es. Fetch the lake right along. Bring me the upper eend of the creek. You’ll find it lyin’ right there.”

“Guess we will,” said Mort. “Now, Quill, h’ist her. Shove!”

How they did shove! But the old miller came out into the road and took the *Ark* by the head, and after that about all the boys had to do was to change the rollers forward as the strong-armed, fat old fellow dragged the light skiff along.

“There, boys. You’re a plucky brace of spring chickens. In with her, now. She’s afloat ag’in.”

“Thank you, Mr. Getty.”

“Don’t forget to fetch me back Pawg Lake, when you find it. An’ the crooked eend of the creek.”

“Crooked?” said Quill. “Tell you what, I guess we’ll have to meandrew pretty much all the way.”

“Andrew what? Oh yes. Guess you will. Go it! Good-bye.”

Off they went, and now their time had come for actual rowing. The upper pond of Corry

IN THE OPEN

Centre was well known to be a deep one. It was wonderfully, perilously far from its smooth surface to the home of the eels on its weedy bottom in some places. It lay in a narrow valley, however, between the slopes of steep hills, and it was long rather than wide.

“Isn’t this a big thing, Mort? I was never out on any such voyage as this before. Were you?”

“Don’t believe anybody else ever was. Not around here. It’s a new thing.”

“Wonder what the boys ’ll say? Mort, we might hold on here long enough to catch a fish or two.”

“No, sir-ree! We’ll just meandrew till we get to Pawg Lake.”

They were pulling nicely along just then, quite a distance above the mill and near the eastern shore of the pond, when a clear, pleasant voice sang out to them:

“Hey, boys! Put me across the pond, please?”

The manner and the accent of that hail were offensively correct and polite, and there at the edge of the woody bank stood a young man of middle size. He carried a joint rod instead of a fish-pole; he had a sort of butterfly net on a

UP THE CREEK

stick, and everything about him was nice and expensive to that degree which always arouses the hostility of country village boys. Still, these two were on their good behavior that morning, and their hearts were a little warm over the conduct of Mr. Getty. The *Ark* was pulled ashore and the stranger was taken on board.

“Straight across, please. Nice boat you have. Capital fun for bright young fellows like you. Spending your day out of school on the water? Good idea.”

“Course it is,” said Mort; but Quill Sanders added:

“I say, mister, got any fish in your basket yet?”

“Not one, my boy. No luck at all this morning.”

“Guess you won’t catch any ’round here, with all that there fancy rigging.”

“Think not? Ah, here we are. Put me ashore. Will a dime apiece do?”

He held out a couple of bits of shining silver as he spoke, but he had already stirred the pride of the crew of the *Ark*.

“No, thank you,” said Quill Sanders. “We’re on a voyage of discovery. We won’t take pay

IN THE OPEN

for any kindnesses we do to the natives we meet."

"You don't say! Voyage of discovery. New World. All that sort of thing. Arctic circle. North Pole. Sandwich Islands."

"No, sir-ree!" exclaimed Mort. "We're bound for Pawg Lake. All the way up the Taponican."

"That's this mighty stream, I suppose, and Pawg Lake is at the mysterious end of it. Boys, it isn't of any manner of use. I'm not a native; only stopping in the village for a week. You've got to take me on board the—the what's her name?"

"The *Ark*," said Mort, with much dignity, "and we're not calling for passengers."

"Passengers? Oh no, I'm one of the crew. I'd ship before the mast if there was one. Just let me take those oars and work my watch on deck. Then I'll go below while you take yours."

He had again seated himself, even while he was speaking, and Mort Hopkins hardly knew why he didn't resist the sudden seizure of those oars.

Then there came a surprise to both of them, for the stranger made the *Ark* spin around, and get her head up-stream, and glide away over

UP THE CREEK

the water, after a fashion to which she was entirely unaccustomed.

“Quill,” said Mort, “he can row.”

“Mister,” said Quill, “did you bring any lunch with you?”

“I did, my young friend. I am provisioned for the voyage. Is it a long one?”

“All the way up Taponican Creek, and it just meandrews.”

“You don’t say! Have to tack around the short corners, and all that sort of thing. Are the natives at all dangerous?”

“Never been there,” said Mort, “’cept once, when father and Uncle Hiram and the Dutch house-painter went to Pawg a-fishin’, and took me along.”

“Did they catch anything?”

“Guess they did; but they had things to catch ’em with. Something better than that there whip-stalk and a spool o’ thread.”

“They were wise men. We will see what we can do when we get there. Nice boat, this is. I can make her meandrew all the way. If we don’t discover something, it won’t be our fault.”

“He just can row,” began Quill to Mort; but at that moment the stranger began to pull a little more slowly, and they could hardly believe

IN THE OPEN

their ears. He struck into a ringing, musical song that kept time with the oars. That was surprise enough, but what made it bad was that they could not understand one word he was singing.

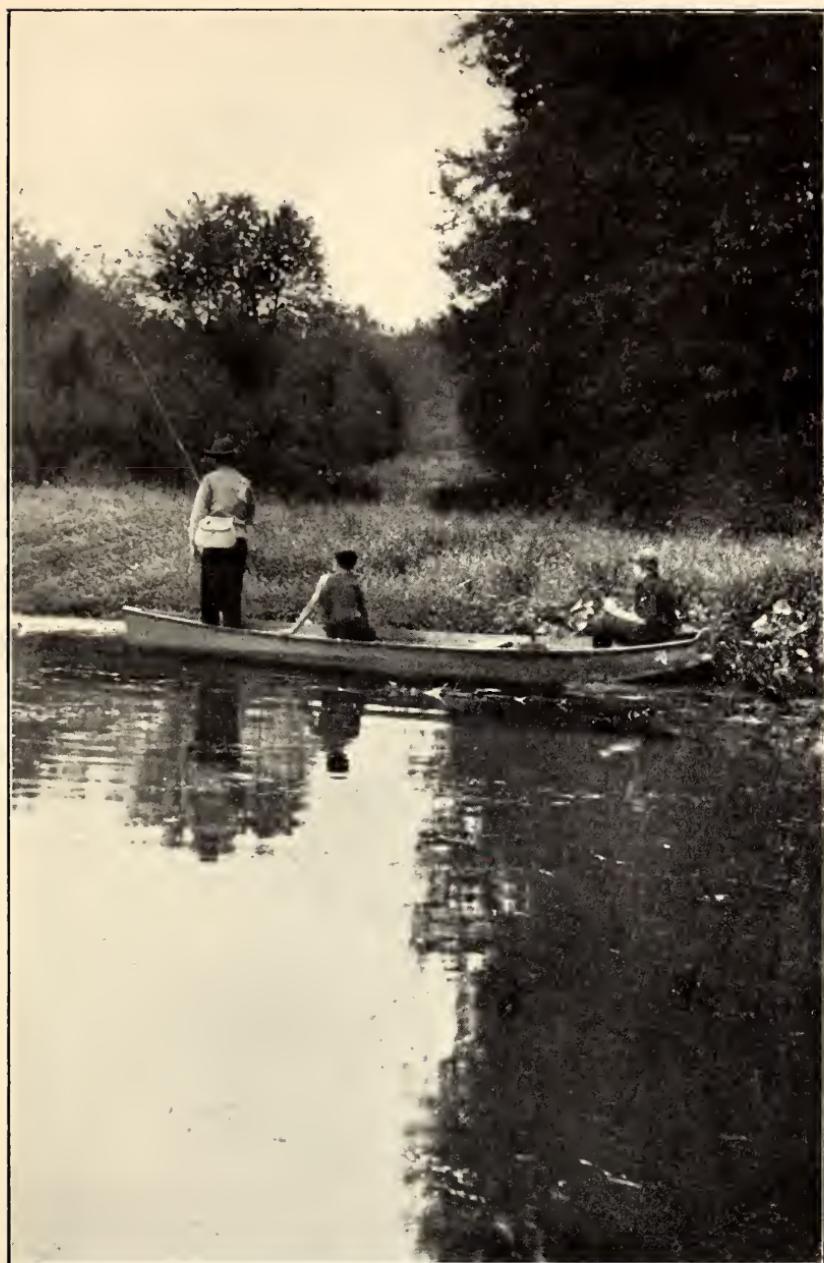
“Quill,” whispered Mort, “I was pop sure he wasn’t born in this country. He’s a foreigner.”

They were out of the pond now, and there was no question whatever of the crookedness with which the creek wound its way in and out among the pastures and meadows. There was nowhere a very strong current, and the boys were a little surprised to find their favorite stream at once so deep and so narrow. Its character was very different from any it was able to earn below the pond and down through the village.

“It’s awful clean, though,” said Quill, “and there’s any amount of trees and bushes along the banks.”

“Boys,” exclaimed the stranger at last, “I’m going to try one of those shady hollows for a trout! Quill, you take an oar, and paddle me along slowly into that black-looking cove up yonder. I’ll show you something new. Mort, you get back into the stern.”

“He knows our names,” muttered Mort.



IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL CAST, IF THE BOYS HAD BUT KNOWN IT

UP THE CREEK

But it was no fault of theirs if he did not. He gave Quill a few more directions, and then he stood well forward, with the light, graceful rod they had called a "whip-stalk" poised in his right hand. The wind was gently blowing upstream, and the stranger said, very quietly:

"That'll do. Steady, now."

And then they heard the faint hum of the reel on his rod, and a gossamer flight of fine line, with three little bits of fuzzy things at the end of it, each about the size of a small gray moth, dropped on the water as light as thistle-down.

It was a beautiful cast, if the boys had but known it, and the flies alighted in a spot of dark water almost under the bank, where a little eddy made a faint ripple on the surface.

Splash! Something bright and vigorous sprang clear out of the water!

"Struck! I'll get him. Steady, Quill; don't pull a stroke. He's a heavy one this time. I must give him all the line he wants. He's off up-stream."

How that reel did buzz, and how the excited boys did watch the motions of their new acquaintance!

"He'll run all the way to Pawg," said Mort.

IN THE OPEN

"Not with that hook in him," said Quill.
"See! he's a-winding him up again."

The reel was a "multiplier," and the line came in swiftly enough, for the fisherman had "snubbed" his victim, and turned him toward the boat. Out and in, again and again, went the line, but at last the boys had seen the prize, and knew it was a bigger speckled trout than they supposed Taponican contained.

"Here he comes! Now for the net!"

Both his young friends had long since decided that that machine was designed for "catching minnies," but now its round loop was skilfully thrust under the exhausted fish, as he allowed himself to be dragged alongside. No strain on the slender line. Only a quick, easy "lift," and then a beauty of a trout, more than a pound in weight, lay flopping on the bottom of the *Ark*.

"Whoop! hurrah!"

"Isn't he a buster?"

"Just look at his spots, Quill."

"We never catch 'em, 'cause they feed on flies, and you have to scoop 'em in."

"Now, boys, more fun."

They were ready for it, and there was plenty of it all the way to Pawg. The trout were bit-

UP THE CREEK

ing freely, and every eddy and circling pool on which the interesting stranger's flies alighted yielded up its share of glittering spoil.

"This is your lake? Upon my word, it's a pretty one. There's an island right out in the middle. Boys, we must go and discover that island. It'll be a good place to eat our lunch in. Did you know it was about time for seamen like us to eat something? It hadn't occurred to me before, but I am as hungry as a bear!"

They knew, but the very excitement of it kept them silent, and Quill again gave up the oars to the stranger. He made short work of that stretch of smooth, sunny water, and the *Ark's* original crew were proud of her. It seemed but a few minutes before she ran almost up on shore in a little cove of the thickly wooded islet.

"Magnificent! Ours by right of discovery. Boys, we must have a fire. You go for loose sticks and things, while I kindle one."

What could they do but shout their loudest, and dart away after supplies of firewood?

"He's got some matches," said Quill. "He's lighting a piece of paper. He's kindling some brush."

IN THE OPEN

He was certainly a very remarkable man for two boy-boatmen to meet on a cruise like the one in question, for, even while the bright blaze leaped out through the first black smudge of smoke, he burst into another foreign song.

The stranger was standing by his fire, fanning it with his wide-brimmed straw hat, and his closely trimmed curly head was bare. They could guess that he was not more than twenty, and he was a very handsome young fellow, if his clothes had not been so fine.

“This is great,” he muttered to himself. “First piece of genuine out-and-out fun I’ve had since I got here. Hullo, what’s this?”

There had been an unnoticed rustle among the trees and bushes to the right of him.

“Please, sir, we—we—we’re—are—are—all drownded.”

The words came out all broken to pieces by childish sobs, and there stood a pretty little barefooted girl of eight or nine summers looking up at him. Her rosy face was wet with tears, and the larger share of her dress looked as if it were wet with Pawg Lake water.

“Drowned, my dear? Is that so? Were you drowned?”

“N-n-n-o—no, sir.”

UP THE CREEK

“Were any of the rest drowned?”

“N-n-n-o, sir, but Aunt Sally can’t make the boat swim, ’cause there’s come a hole in it.”

“That’s awful. Tell Aunt Sally to bring it to me, and I’ll mend it.”

“She—she can’t come. She’s lost one of her shoes.”

“Is that so? We must go and hunt for that shoe.”

“We did hunt, and she got her feet wet. It’s in the mud. ‘Way down.”

“Boys, come on. We’ve got a shipwreck.”

“Hear that, Quill?”

“See that girl, Mort? There’s something happened. Come on.”

They stopped as they went by to throw their armfuls of stick and bark on the fire, and then they dashed after their dandy fisherman, who was already following the eager leading of the wet little girl. She was in a desperate hurry, and she led the way almost straight across the islet. This did not contain more than a couple of acres of rocks and trees, and was easy to cross; but there on the northern shore was a scene which both Mort Hopkins and Quill Sanders understood at a glance.

A large, square-nosed, rickety-looking old

IN THE OPEN

punt of a boat was pulled part way up on a log at the water's edge, and anybody could see that one of her worn-out bottom boards had fallen away bodily from its proper place.

"There's no sort of float in that thing," said Quill to Mort.

"No, sirree; she's done for."

"One, two, three, four, five, besides my little wet messenger," remarked their grown-up friend. And then he added: "I declare! A young lady!"

They saw him color slightly, too, as a tall, well-dressed, and quite pretty girl of seventeen or near it slowly arose from the rock on which she had been sitting. She did not come forward, and she was bushing, and Quill whispered:

"Mort, where's her other shoe?"

"Lost it, I guess. They're awfully shipwrecked. Let's rescue 'em."

"Hush! Hear that fellow talk. She's telling him all about it."

There was very little to tell. She had taken her sister and niece and some little girls who were visiting them out for a boat ride on Pawg Lake. They all lived near the head of it. The girls danced about. The boat began to leak. She rowed to the islet because it was nearest.

UP THE CREEK

She tried to fix the loose board, and it came all the way off. They had been there for hours. Nobody on shore knew where they were.

“How many mothers are anxious?” asked the fisherman.

“Three, and quite a number of aunts and uncles and fathers.”

“We must put you ashore at once, then. I really cannot doctor that boat. Boys, may I land them in the *Ark*?”

“Why, that’s what we came for,” said Quill Sanders, a little vaguely.

“What they came for?” said the young lady, with one foot a trifle behind the other.

“Exactly,” said the fisherman. “All the way from I don’t know where. I’m only a foremast hand. They are the captains and owners. Will you walk over? No, please, I’ll bring the *Ark* around here.”

“Thank you, I wish you would.”

“Come on, boys. This is better fun than catching trout.”

“Well, it is,” said Mort.

“Mister,” remarked Quill, “if we all crowd into the *Ark*, we’ll sink her.”

“We must look out for that. You and Mort

IN THE OPEN

stay here, and I'll row the girls ashore, and come back after you."

"Capital idea! We'll take her right around, and rescue 'em all."

They did so; but just as they were pulling to the beach where the old punt lay, Mort came out of a sort of thoughtful fit, and said, suddenly:

"Guess it won't do, Quill. You and I'll stay and take care of the island, while he puts the girls ashore."

"I don't care. Let him."

The pretty young lady was the first to remark upon the small size of the *Ark*, and received for reply:

"She's withered a good deal since Noah's time. If you'll take the stern seat, I'll try and stow the rest in. The boys have volunteered to wait here for me."

"We shall crowd your boat."

"Not at all; but there will be no room for them to dance out any of the bottom boards. The passengers must keep still. Is it of any use to fish around for your shoe?"

"No, sir. It's in the mud. I stepped out in a hurry. It came off."

"I see. Yes. Glad you took better care of

UP THE CREEK

the other. I'm sorry for that shoe. Now, children—young ladies, I mean—if you don't want another shipwreck, and all to be drowned again, you'll keep still till we get ashore. If any of you wish to speak to me, call me Ham. All the rest of the *Ark*'s original crew have gone somewhere."

Away he pulled, and Quill Sanders and Mort Hopkins sat on the shore and watched him, until the former exclaimed:

"Mort, we might as well save the time. Let's go and eat something."

"It's a big thing, Quill. We'll have an awful time getting honie."

The fire was blazing finely, and the two young discoverers found their appetites all they could ask for. They even discussed the propriety of cooking a trout or so, but decided that it would be better to catch some fish for themselves. There were plenty of promising places along shore, but the results astonished them.

"Mort," said Quill, at the end of ten minutes, "did you ever know fish to bite this way?"

"Never. Got another. Here he comes—perch. What's yours?"

IN THE OPEN

“Hurrah! it’s a pickerel.”

Not a very heavy one, but in he came, and the excitement of that next hour of Pawg Lake fishing made it seem a wonderfully short one.

“Quill,” said Mort, “there he comes.”

“I knew he’d bring the boat back.”

“Of course he would.”

There he was in a few minutes more, smiling as ever, and remarking: “Come along, boys; you are both wanted at Ararat.”

“Where?” said Quill.

“Where the *Ark* landed her passengers. Come along. I’m a dove, with no end of olive-branch in my mouth.”

They gathered their fish, and hurried into the boat, while he explained that the long absence of that shipwrecked young lady and her younger companions had stirred up a tremendous excitement along the shores of Pawg Lake, and that their rescue was no small affair.

“I have been kissed by any number of mothers and aunts, and have had to shake hands with quite a large body of men. You boys must come and take your share.”

“Don’t you do it, Quill,” said Mort. “Let’s go right home.”

UP THE CREEK

“Yes, mister. I say, give me the oars, and I'll start for the creek.”

“Couldn't think of it, my young friends. I gave my word I would bring you ashore,” said the fisherman.

There was no help for it, and in what seemed to them a terribly short time Quill and Mort were the centre of a crowd of people in a big farm-house. They were compelled to eat again until they could not eat any more; but Quill remarked, in a whisper:

“Glad none of 'em hugged me, Mort. That woman looked like it.”

The whole subject of the voyage of discovery came out, and when dinner was over—it was supper, too, and almost anything else—and the boys declared they must set out for home, a big man, who owned the farm-house, and was father of the “shipwrecked” young lady and her sister, and uncle of the wet little girl, got up and said:

“Home? Of course. Come on, boys. I've fixed all that.”

So he had; for there was the largest kind of a lumber-wagon, with the *Ark* already in it, and a man holding the horses, ready to start.

IN THE OPEN

“That’s our boat,” said Quill.

“So it is,” said the fisherman. “I’m going with you. It’s the first voyage of discovery that ever went home overland, ship and all.”

“Quill,” whispered Mort just then, “either she’s found her shoe, or she had another pair.”

The young lady was blushing remarkably all the while they were getting into the wagon, and the fisherman said “good-bye” for the crew of the *Ark*.

When they reached Corry Centre, the driver pulled up in front of the village tavern.

“Here’s your trout,” said Quill, as their strange friend sprang lightly out.

“Keep ‘em—keep ‘em. Best day’s fun I ever had. I’m coming down to hunt you boys up to-morrow. Good-bye. Take care of the *Ark*.”

“Good-bye!” they both shouted as they were hurried away. But they had to turn at once and answer the driver’s question about where he was to go next.

They were glad enough to get home safe and sound; but even when the *Ark* was once more floating in Taponican Creek, near the bridge, Quill and Mort had to look hard at her and at

UP THE CREEK

each other, and then at the trout and their own strings of Pawg Lake fish, before they could quite make up their minds that they had not been dreaming a good deal that splendid Saturday.

XV

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

The Exploits of a Pony

HERE was a great deal of meekness in the face of that pony, and you could not tell what else it was that looked out of the corner of his right eye. He stood in a patch of pretty good grass at the side of the road, about half a mile from Deacon Hackett's gate. He was all alone, and it may be that part of the expression of his face was lonely.

“Kyle! Kyle! come look a-here! Stray hoss!” shouted a clear, shrill voice in the road, and at once the ears which had been turned back limply were pricked forward sharply, and another kind of look shot out from the pony's left eye.

Behind that patch of grass a thicket of raspberry bushes, and out of it came a clearer, shriller, more positive voice.

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

"Hold on to him, Ned! Hold him! I'm a-coming. Don't let go of him."

"I ain't a-holding of him; I haven't touched him; he might kick," responded Ned. "He doesn't know me."

"I'm coming." And in a moment more there were two boys looking at the pony, and there was also a pony looking sidewise at the two boys.

"Cuyler Hackett," said the taller of the two, "you daren't touch him. Perhaps he's vicious—"

"No, he isn't," said the shorter boy, sturdily. "That isn't a vicious horse. I know all about horses. He's a Canada pony."

"How do you know he's a Canada pony?" asked Ned. "He's just a pony, and that's all there is of him."

"Somebody's lost him, Ned Runyon," said Kyle, "and we've found him."

"No, we haven't," said Ned. "You couldn't catch him. Some horses 'll bite at a stranger."

"He won't bite," said Kyle. But he took a step nearer the stranger a little cautiously.

"Soh! soh! soh!" he said. "Poor fellow! Whoa, boy! Soh-oh, boy!"

Kyle's right hand went out slowly and gently,

IN THE OPEN

as he took yet another step, and then it suddenly dropped.

From the open mouth of that lost pony, and from all over him, by way of his mouth, there came the most remarkable whinny.

“Come back, Kyle! come back!” exclaimed Ned.

“Oh, that isn’t anything,” said Kyle, once more taking a resolute step in advance. “He doesn’t mean anything at all. I know about horses. Soh! soh! Whoa, boy!”

“Chicker-nicker-flicker-e-e-e-chucker-aw-aw—” came once more the prolonged, mournful whinny, as if the lost pony were thinking of his friends. Perhaps one of them was a mule, and the pony was trying to remember something he had said.

“Look out for his heels, Kyle,” hoarsely whispered Ned. “He looks as if he was getting ready to kick.”

“Be still, Ned,” whispered back Kyle. “He’s all right. Soh-oh, boy—whoa—”

But the pony had turned his heels toward the fence, and was facing Kyle with another and very peculiar look on his face, and Kyle hesitated.

“Tell you what, Ned,” he said, as he drew

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

back, "we can't do anything more without a bridle. There's one at our barn that 'd fit him—"

"Let's go and get it," said Ned, and he set off at once, as if he was almost glad to get away from the neighborhood of that mysterious quadruped.

"No use to do anything else," said Kyle, as he followed Ned. "You can't manage any horse without a bridle. Hope he'll be there when we get back. Let's run."

"Cuyler Hackett," gasped Ned, the first time they paused for breath, "one of us 'd ought to have stayed and kept watch on him, so's he wouldn't get away."

"That's so," said Kyle, "but it's too late now. We must have the bridle. All our folks are over to your aunt Janc's house, but mother 'd let me take it, I know."

The visit to the barn was a quick one, but it seemed as if it took an hour, and all that while the lost pony was wandering along the road by himself. He was not running away. He was hardly even walking. He seemed to be hunting for the best bites of grass here and there.

"There he is!" shouted Ned, as they once more came out into the road. "We've got him. Would you dare put the bridle on!"

IN THE OPEN

"I ain't afraid," said Kyle. "I've put bridles on horses lots of times."

Perhaps he had, but he looked serious enough when he again began to make advances toward the lost pony.

"Soh, boy! Whoa—wh-wh-whoa, poor fellow. Keep back, Ned—kee-eep still—whoa!"

Very meekly, very soberly, and very submissively did the lost pony put out his head, and he even appeared to help in getting on that bridle. Then he leaned his head affectionately on Cuyler Hackett's shoulder and let off a whinny as long as your arm.

"Ned," said Kyle, "let's name him."

"Nig's a good name for a black pony," said Ned.

"Brick's a better name. I'm going to call him Brick," said Kyle, as if that decided the matter. "Wish we had a saddle. I'll just lead him along a little."

The pony was looking at him out of the corner of his left eye when he said that, and he may have been thinking. At all events, when Kyle and the end of the bridle began to move, the pony stood perfectly still.

"Come, Brick," said Kyle, sharply. "Chuck, chuck! Get up! G'lang!"

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

Brick was evidently not deaf, but he heard as if he did not hear, and not one of his four feet moved.

"Hold that bridle, Ned!" shouted Kyle, with a severe tone and look. "I must get me a gad. I'll show him. He's got to get along—"

There were bushes enough at hand, and one of them supplied Kyle with an effective-looking switch. Brick watched the cutting of that switch, and three times running he shut both his eyes, as if it pained him to look at it. He opened them, one at a time, moreover, while Ned stood as far away as the length of his arm and of the bridle would let him.

"If a horse shows the whites of his eyes, it's a sign he's vicious," said Ned, stretching his arm another inch or so.

"I'm coming," said Kyle. "Some horses have got to have the gad. Give me hold of that bridle! Git up! G'lang!"

For one moment Brick seemed disposed to disobey, but Kyle flourished the whip savagely, and it had its effect.

Brick drooped his black head, meekly, sorrowfully, but he stepped out. Alas for him! One secret of his forlorn condition was discovered at once.

IN THE OPEN

“Ned,” exclaimed Kyle, “he’s awful lame in his left forefoot.”

“Poor fellow!” exclaimed Ned, “how he does limp! What can you do?”

“I just want to see what’s the matter,” said Kyle, stooping low to look at the limb the pony limped upon.

Step after step went Brick, and each limp was more pitiful than the last.

“Ned,” said Kyle, “that horse has got to go to Dr. Dusenbury. There’s something the matter with his pastern. We’ve got to tie it up and lead him over to Dr. Dusenbury’s. He can cure him.”

Brick evidently knew that he had found friends. He felt it, too, to judge by the length of the sorrowful whinny he uttered while Kyle was tying his own white handkerchief around the tough, hard-looking ankle, where the cause of the dreadful limp was hidden.

Whether or not the bandage did any good, Brick appeared to be a trifle less lame, while he humbly and gently followed his two young sympathizers, but then they were willing to walk slowly. Kyle told Ned Runyon a great deal about horses as they went along, and he also told him great things about Dr. Jedediah Dusenbury, the horse-doctor.

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

"He's a complete veteran," said Kyle.
"Doctors cows, too."

There might be some hope for Brick in the hands of such a man, and Ned said he hoped so.

If Brick had known where he was going, he might have been afraid, but as it was, he allowed himself to be led right along, until they came to a fence that was mostly gateway; that is, it had more posts than rails, and the yard beyond it had some of the biggest burdocks and bull-thistles you ever saw. There was a house there, too, and beyond it were some barns.

In front of the house, if the other side of it was not really the front, and you couldn't exactly tell, stood a tall, sober-looking old man, with yellowish eyes and a reddish face, and with the stiffest kind of a white beard sticking out about three inches from his lower jaw. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and he wore corduroys and cow-hide boots. He stood and waited until the boys led up their pony, and he hardly uttered a word while Cuyler Hackett explained to him the difficulty under which Brick was limping. Ned kept still, and he just wondered how Kyle came to know so much about horses.

"That's all that ails him, Dr. Dusenbury," said Kyle, in conclusion. "Can you cure him?"

IN THE OPEN

“Course I can; ‘course I can,” said the doctor, gruffly. “Don’t you see that sign? I’m a veterinary surg’n, I am. Curin’ hosses is my perfesh’n. You hold on. All he needs is some of my Everlastin’ Liniment.”

Into the house he went, and he limped on his right leg at every step; but then he was not a horse, and it takes another kind of liniment to cure a lame man. When he came out, he had a bottle in his hand, and it took him full five minutes to tell Ned and Kyle how wonderful was the reddish-brown stuff it was full of.

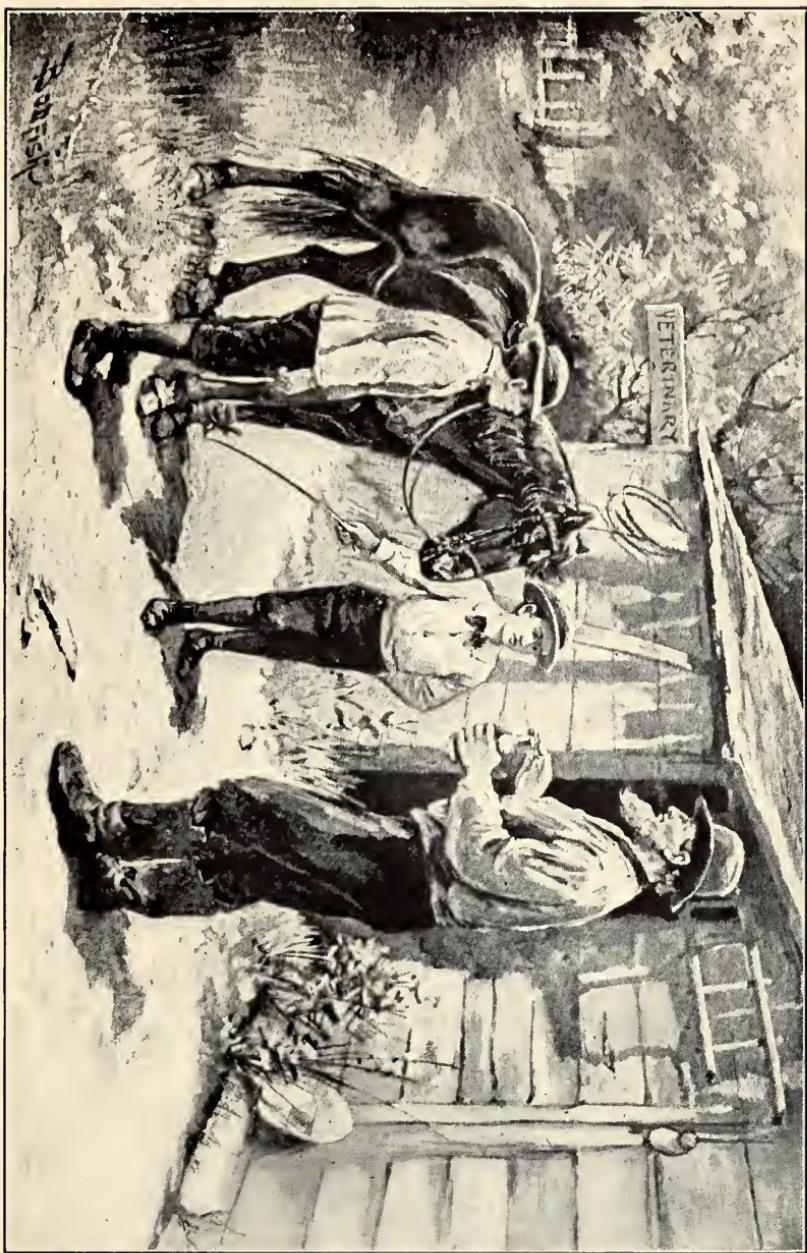
“Take off the bandages,” he said. “He may be a hard case. May take a month. May take six months. May take a year. May have to use forty bottles, but it ’ll cure him.”

Off came the handkerchief, and the hairy skin of Brick’s left foreleg was liberally bathed with the magical cure-everything from the bottle.

“There!” exclaimed Dr. Dusenbury. “If you put it on twice a day—”

But Brick began at once to walk around, and he did not show a trace of lameness in that left foreleg. He stepped with it firmly and freely, but an increasing limp could be noticed in his right foreleg as he walked.

“I declare!” exclaimed Dr. Dusenbury. “I’ve



"ALL HE NEEDS IS SOME OF MY EVERLASTIN' LINIMENT!"

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

seen that happen afore. 'Tisn't anything new. Fact is, I was kind o' waitin' to see 'f 'twould come to be so this time."

"Why, doctor," said Kyle, "what's the matter now? Did we make any mistake which leg it was?"

"Not a bit! not a bit!" exclaimed the doctor. "The liniment has druv the lameness out of one leg into t'other. We can fix that right off."

The right ankle of the patient pony, or the pony patient, was bathed as the other had been, and the result was all that could be asked for. That leg also was at once restored to perfect health, and Brick walked around easily, casting meek glances sidewise at Dr. Dusenbury. Suddenly, however, he began to limp fearfully in his left hind leg.

"There it comes!" exclaimed the doctor. "It's got there, boys. I know just what to do, though, and we'll drive it clean out of him. May take forty bottles, may take six months, may take a year, but we'll work it."

There was a great deal of magical medicine rubbed over Brick's left hind leg with perfect success, and then just what Dr. Dusenbury looked for happened, and his right hind leg had to be treated in the same way. When all was

IN THE OPEN

over the bottle was empty, the boys were almost awe-struck, and Brick was trotting around as gay as a lark.

“There,” said the doctor. “It’s all right, boys. I’ll see Deacon Hackett ‘bout pay. Bring him here or hev me send the med’cine to the house. It’s jest one of them cases I like to do for.”

Kyle could not have told Ned if he had tried exactly how he felt about Brick and Dr. Dusenbury, and Ned did not even try to tell how he himself felt. Brick whinnied a little, and on the whole he behaved so well that, as soon as the boys were out in the road and nobody could see them, Kyle’s courage came up to the right point.

“Ned Runyon,” he said, “I’m going to ride him.”

“What if he should rear and throw you off?” said Ned.

“Let him rear,” said Kyle. “I ain’t afraid. I’ve ridden horses. I’ll lead him up alongside of the fence.”

It was easy to do that, and in half a minute more Kyle was mounted on Brick.

“Doesn’t he canter fine?” shouted Kyle. “It’s just as easy.”

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

"I ain't afraid," said Ned. "I'd as lief ride him as not. Why don't you ride to our house 'n' show him to the folks?"

"That's just what I'll do!" shouted Kyle. "I can turn him any way I want to."

Ned was a good runner, and the pony's canter carried him up and down rather than ahead. It was easy enough for Ned to keep up with Brick, and Kyle guided him through a wide-open gate and up the curve of a gravelly drive.

The steps of a wide piazza came down to the middle of that drive, and there were ladies in chairs all around the piazza.

"There's mother," said Ned, "and your mother, and Aunt Jane, and your aunt, and the Miss Snodgrasses."

A pair of men on horseback were riding rapidly down the road just then. They saw some reason for pulling up in front of that house, for dismounting, and for tying their horses. They tied them just as Mrs. Hackett got up very suddenly.

"Cuyler!" she exclaimed. "My son! Where did you get that pony? Get off. He might throw you."

"Kyle knows all about horses!" shouted Ned

IN THE OPEN

Runyon. "He caught him. He tamed him. It was Dr. Dusenbury that cured him, though."

A big half-bushel basket could have been filled with all the things the other ladies said, and that Kyle said in the next quarter of a minute. Kyle cantered right past the steps of the piazza, and then Brick wheeled and came back of his own accord. He stopped, too, in front of the steps, and Kyle gave the reins the least tiny bit of a jerk.

"Cuyler! my son! Oh my!" screamed Mrs. Hackett. And all the rest also said "Oh my!" for Brick quietly sat down in the middle of the drive, and Kyle keeled back clean off from him into a bed of four-o'clocks, with a rose-bush in the middle.

"Napoleon Bonaparte," severely remarked one of the men who had tied his horse and had walked fast up the drive, "don't you know better than to sit down in the presence of ladies? Stand up, sir!"

Brick gave the longest kind of whinny in reply; but he at once arose upon his hind feet, gently pawing the air in front of him.

"That 'll do, sir!" said the man. "Show the lady that you are an emperor. Shake hands with her."

A CASE FOR THE DOCTOR

Kyle came out of those four-o'clocks and the middle of that rose-bush like a flash, but all he said was:

“Oh, mother, I ain’t hurt a bit! He was lame. Look at that!”

Brick was behaving like a very good emperor, and was holding out his right forehoof to Mrs. Hackett. She must have felt safe about Kyle, for she shook hands with the pony, while he bowed to her.

“Napoleon Bonaparte, madam,” said the man, “is a very wicked pony. He got away from the circus late yesterday afternoon, and we’ve been hunting him everywhere. I’m glad he has been good to the boys. Sometimes he isn’t good to anybody; but what he doesn’t know, for a pony, isn’t worth anybody’s while to teach him.”

“What ’ll Dr. Dusenbury say to that, Kyle?” said Ned.

“I don’t care—” began Kyle; but both of the men began to laugh.

“Napoleon Bonaparte, which foot is the lamest?” asked the man who had spoken.

Brick turned at once, picked off Ned’s hat, and walked half-way up the steps, holding it out like a beggar, and limping dreadfully, on

IN THE OPEN

one foot after another, as if he were uncertain.

"That 'll do," said the man. "You've scared the ladies. Beg pardon, madam. I must hurry away with him. Good-bye, boys. Tell Dr. Dusenbury to come to me and I'll pay him. I'm glad he's got some liniment that's worth something. Come along, Nap."

That was the way Kyle Hackett and Ned Runyon lost their pony, but when they went and told Dr. Dusenbury, he said there was a mistake about it somewhere.

THE END

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